



G. G. Bolich, Ph.D.

Knowledge. An Illustrated History

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*For all who stretch toward knowledge,
but especially for Justin Weber*

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Apollonius of Tyre relates, “As Crates took him by his cloak to drag him from Stilpo, Zeno said, ‘Crates, *if you intend to grab a philosopher do it by the ears!* Persuasion is certainly the way to draw one, yet if you forcibly drag me away, my body will be with you, but my soul will remain at Stilpo.’”

(Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Zeno*, VII.24)

“Come now, let us reason together. . . .”

(Isaiah 1:18)

Introduction

Navigating this Book

This book is *a* story about knowledge, specifically how it has been thought about in the West. Such a rich, diverse, and long story can be told in more than one way. This telling of the story is basic in its content, with limited coverage of the more notable figures and ideas. Though it is an artificial task to try to separate out a person's view of knowledge from other matters such as metaphysics or ethics that is what we must substantially attempt to keep this book a manageable size and focused. Toward the same end, description and explanation, rather than analysis, is what is mostly provided. (The analysis that appears is from the various authors commenting on one another.)

Though it would be better to tell this as a world-wide story, the more modest aim here is to tell the part of the story belonging to Western culture, beginning with the ancient Greeks and continuing down to the present. It will be fruitful to balance this presentation with works exploring conceptions of knowledge from outside classical Western civilization.

Our story has themes, such as that knowledge is usually considered as about understanding what is real, that knowing depends on human abilities, and whether we can know anything with certainty is an important question. The most basic theme, though, is a common conviction that human beings stretch themselves to-

ward knowledge. What it is they are reaching for, how they do it, and how far their reach extends is what knowing is about.

Every story also has characters, and this one is full of remarkable thinkers, including some of the most famous in history. Most of these figures are associated with a particular theory or perspective or school of thought and so we shall examine these as we go.

The first chapter sets out *why* knowledge matters. Put most simply, knowledge is important because we must acquire true, dependable information and understand it adequately if we are to survive, and then thrive. From the start the concept of knowledge has been linked to the problem of understanding our world. The importance of how we come to know the world is sparked, in part, by the ideas of Parmenides and Heraclitus, two ancient Greek thinkers whose musings about the nature of reality—early metaphysics—stirred debate because their conceptions seem so different and yet each, in its own way, persuasive. The competition among compelling alternative ways to understand reality drew natural attention to how claims to possess such knowledge should be assessed. Thus the question of what reality *is* (metaphysics) sparked keen interest in how we can *know* what reality is (epistemology).

The first chapter also introduces the style of the whole work, which includes drawing selectively but persistently from important historical voices on the subject at hand. The translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. Especially for modern works I have indicated the original language edition page numbers in box brackets (e.g., [German ed., 14], with select English translations following in parentheses; full in-

formation on these sources is in the Bibliography. With others' translations, I have aimed to provide both older and newer works; the former are often available through online resources. Examining a diversity of translations enriches one's grasp of material. There are footnotes for those interested in greater details (such as the original text, or why certain words are translated as they are, or the comments of scholars found in secondary sources). Illustrations are provided to assist comprehension and to make the text more appealing.

In the next four chapters we examine some of the problems in defining knowledge, trying to answer the question of *what* knowledge is. In the diversity of voices on the subject in Greek philosophy of the 4th century B.C.E. five prominent voices are heard. In chapter 2 the famous Sophist Protagoras offers a provocative proposal on the nature of knowledge, which draws a skeptical Socrates to closely examine it. Socrates' student Plato, who constructs the dialogs by which the ideas of Protagoras and Socrates are explored, has a mind of his own and his influential ideas are also considered. Then Plato's colleague—and rival—Isocrates offers in chapter 3 an alternative perspective which downplays the importance of knowledge next to the practical value of belief. In chapter 4 Plato's student Aristotle presents a spectrum on knowledge that represents the century's most comprehensive examination of the matter.

The efforts to determine what knowledge is lead to a startling—and for many, disturbing—question *if* knowledge is even possible (chapters 5–7). The story in these chapters tracks developments in Greek philosophy, moving across several centuries of time, ranging through prominent schools of philosophy, including

Epicureans (chapter 5), and Stoics (chapter 6), and culminating in the questions and objections of Skeptics (chapter 7).

Chapters 8–10 focus on a matter always present in epistemology: *how* do we know? This question existed for every one of the thinkers covered in the first seven chapters, was essential to each of them, and largely influenced the points and positions they developed. But in one important sense it remained in the background: all of the thinkers agree that *how* is dependent on human abilities, and that such means considering the relative merits of sense-perception and reason.

In this section two other ways appealed to for how one may know—authority and revelation—are considered as we see the Greek presumptions favoring sense-perception and reason significantly challenged by Christian thinking (chapter 8). Then we pick up the story following a resurgence of philosophical Skepticism. Coupled with a split between revelation and reason introduced in Christian thinking the way was opened to reconsider the roles of sense-perception and reason. We see how the epistemological stakes are raised by figures like Descartes (9), the champion of reason, and the British empiricists (chapter 10).

Then we turn to the figure—Immanuel Kant—with whom everyone since has had to reckon (chapter 11). Kant attempts a synthesis of what he sees as correct in both rationalism and empiricism. His solution, presented across a series of dense but thoughtful volumes, brings a kind of ‘Copernican revolution’ in philosophy such that philosophy might be divided between pre- and post-Kantian thinking.

Chapters 12–17 chronicle changes and important positions after Kant. *Who* knows as well as what is known has become a central concern. After Kant, German Idealism develops and culminates in the work of Hegel (chapter 12). Like Descartes, Hume, and Kant, Hegel also proves highly influential on the philosophical work that follows.

The system building of Kant and Hegel is rejected by Existentialism, which is rooted in the spirit of Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's different protests. In the 20th century Existentialism is formally named and develops alongside Phenomenology and the two perspectives become closely linked (chapter 13). The 20th century figures of Husserl and Heidegger in Phenomenology are looked at alongside Sartre, the figure most often chosen to represent Existentialism.

Chapters 14–15 continue looking at 19th–20th century developments. Pragmatism, especially associated with English-speaking philosophers, is examined through the thoughts of its three classical proponents: Peirce, James, and Dewey (chapter 14). A rival perspective that shares with Pragmatism a common desire to bring philosophy closer to natural science is associated with a group of thinkers collectively called Logical Positivists, part of a larger movement called Linguistic or Analytic Philosophy (chapter 15). Figures such as Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Moritz Schlick, founder of the Vienna Circle, are examined.

Then still other ways of knowing are examined. First the philosophy of intuition espoused by Henri Bergson is examined (chapter 16). Although the idea of “intuition” has a long history in epistemology, Bergson infuses it with a distinctive flavor. Then Michael Po-

lanyi with his concept of tacit knowing is considered (chapter 17). The idea that one knows more than one can tell may have important implications for how knowing and knowledge are to be understood.

The volume ends with a brief look at trends at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century (chapter 18). Since a short paper appeared in 1963 a great deal of energy has been spent wrestling with so-called “Gettier cases.” About the same time modern epistemic logic made an impact under the guidance of Jaakko Hintikka. Today a prominent approach is Virtue Epistemology, initiated by Ernest Sosa.

An important caution needs to be sounded as we begin. This book is best approached by seeking to attain a sense of the forest before trying to master the shape of every tree. In short, the best aim is to get a grasp of the big ideas and general shape of the conversation before trying to hold in hand all the details. The coverage on each figure and position is necessarily limited—and that means further study is *required*.

Finally, it may be worth mentioning that this present volume stands in relation to others on the same subject. My special interest has been in the relation of knowledge to belief as seen in *Knowledge & Belief: Their Natures and Relationship in Ancient Greek Thought*. A much shorter version, *Knowledge & Belief Illustrated*, covers the same ground in abbreviated and simpler fashion. While this volume is substantially different, it does reproduce some of the illustrations and some reworked material from my other books. On the matter of belief, my 800 page *Honest Belief, Credible Faith* examines belief and faith—especially in relation to reason and knowledge—from the period of the ancient Greeks to the present.

Chapter 1

Why Does Knowledge Matter?

Heraclitus vs. Parmenides

Aristotle, one of the architects of Western thinking, is convinced that, “All people by nature stretch themselves toward knowledge.”¹ I agree. The Greek term he uses that our English word ‘nature’ translates means an innate quality belonging to us by virtue of our being human. To be human is, in part, to reach for information, to seek understanding, compelled by an inner drive to *know*.

I doubt very many people question *that* knowledge matters even though it appears few ever question *why* it matters. Most of us assume knowledge is important but don’t bother spending much effort thinking about why. This is a situation quite common with respect to things natural to us; we seldom question anything that is intrinsically human because such things simply feel right—like breathing air or drinking water. If we think about them, we know we need to do them to stay alive, but they simply do not call much attention to themselves most of the time.

¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 980a21; Greek: πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει. (*Pantest anthrōpoi tou eidenai oregontai phusei*.) The word translated “knowledge” is εἰδέναι (*eidenai*, fr. οἶδα (*oída*), which is the product of an absolute, complete perception of something, a full knowing of it. The word translated “nature” is φύσει (*phusei*), from φύσις (*phusis*). I refer to ancient writers in the present tense because they live on in the present through their words.

Yet, examining the purpose of knowledge is a good place to begin, as it answers the fundamental question busy people inevitably ask, even if only unconsciously: *So what?* Why should I bother spending any of my all-too-precious time reflecting on the nature and purpose of knowledge when I am crowded about by the urgent demands of living? Perhaps more to the point, why bother dwelling on something so basic, so natural, and so inevitable that it will certainly persist in pushing and pulling me whether I give it a moment's thought or not?

These are fair questions. Many people seem to get along just fine without offering a moment's thought to why knowledge matters; its purpose continues unabated whether glimpsed or not. On the other hand, as Socrates points out when on trial for his life, “an unexamined life is not worth living.”² To be fully human—‘all we can be’ as the saying goes—requires at the very least *self*-examination. If nothing else, we seek to know ourselves and we do so in more than one context.

First of all, most of us are narcissistic enough that we prioritize self-knowledge over knowing others. The famous Roman philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius catches the reality well when he writes in his *Meditations*, “Truthfully, a person is not easily tormented by not seeing what goes on in another person's *psyche*, but any-

² Plato, *Apology*, 38a; Greek: ὁ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ (*ho de anexetastos bios ou biōtos anthrōpō*). The key word is ἀνεξέταστος (*anexetastos*), “unexamined”—an adjective opposite in sense to the verb ἐξετάζω (*exetazō*), referring to the kind of examination one might receive in school—a close testing meant to see what one has achieved or learned—or an inspection like military troops receive, to determine their care and readiness.

one who does not follow the motions of his own *psyche* will inevitably be miserable.”³ Part of normal human health is tracking ourselves psychologically.

But we are self-centered with respect to the world as well. We are interested in others, first because we need them to survive, later because they enrich us. When it comes to knowledge about *things*—no matter what they might be—we prioritize those things we see as relevant to our own person and needs. This makes sense as doing so is important to our health and safety. If we live in an environment where inattention to real and present dangers can prove fatal, why wouldn’t we seek to know as much as we can about such dangers?

All of this points to why knowledge matters. We seek knowledge because we *need* it. Knowledge helps us survive and beyond that basic requirement helps us to thrive. We are curious, but not without purpose. So our basic answer to the ‘So what?’ question is exactly this: We need knowledge to live and live well. We must be able to accumulate information about Nature and understand it if we are to survive, let alone thrive.

Competing Views on the Nature of Reality

Precisely because we are so busy with living and hemmed in by life’s demands we must set aside time for knowing, and when we start with knowing about the world we live in we lay a fruitful foundation for living and relating.

³ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, II.8. The Greek ψυχή (*psuchē*) I will render simply by the transliteration *psyche*. It has different senses in various contexts and is often rendered in English by the words “soul” or “mind.” It refers essentially to that which makes a person alive. Cf. Heraclitus, *On Nature*, fragment 116.

Our intellectual ancestors came to the same conclusion—that knowledge's roots are in understanding the universe within which we live. To understand ourselves means also to understand the world in which we have being. For those of us raised in the West, ancient Greek philosophers set down basic ideas about reality and knowledge that have ever since contributed substantially to our thinking on these matters. Their careful attention to the question of why knowledge matters grew directly out of an earlier wrestling with the question of what reality is. They sought the very *essence* of all things to get a big picture and develop an internal logic that would make sense of all the individual things—ourselves included—that we encounter.

This goal proved elusive. When early Greek philosophers considered the nature of reality they found themselves in profound disagreement. To illustrate the matter, we might begin with two 5th century B.C.E. figures, Parmenides and Heraclitus, whose views square off in a metaphysical bout for the ages.



In this corner . . . Heraclitus and in this corner . . . Parmenides

Heraclitus

Heraclitus (or Heracleitus) of Ephesus, around the dawn of the 5th century before the Christian Era (C.E.), appeals to a knowledge of reality he thinks anyone can achieve, though few do. This is not to say, however,

that Heraclitus puts his ideas forth in a clear, easy-to-understand fashion. He has not infrequently, in both past and present, been called “the obscure one.”⁴ In manner of presentation he favors short, striking statements like those offered by a religious oracle. They are subject to more than one interpretation. But the fragments still surviving from his work allow us to attain a suitable enough broad grasp of his thinking.

In the very first of these fragments Heraclitus declares, “I set out in detail the nature of each thing and point out how it is in its acts.”⁵ Reality can be known. But in this same opening fragment (and elsewhere) he complains about the persistent lack of human understanding of reality—a lack existing despite the abundant

⁴ Greek σκοτεινός (*skoteinos*); Latin *obscurus*. Heraclitus was being referred to in such manner from at least the time of Cicero in the late Roman Republic.

⁵ Heraclitus, *On Nature*, fragment 1; Greek: ὁκοίων ἐγὼ διηγέσθαι κατὰ φύσιν διαιρέων ἕκαστον καὶ φράζων ὅπως ἔχει (*hokoion egō diegumai kata phusin diaireōn hekaston kai phrazōn hokōs echei*). I have translated ὅπως ἔχει (*hokōs echei*) rather robustly as “how it is in its acts,” because simpler renderings of *echei* as “is” or “condition” or “behaves” are more misleading than helpful. Of these the last comes closer to capturing the sense here. The nature of things is in their acts (how they present to the world). The numbering of the fragments follows that established in Hermann Diehl’s *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (*The Fragments of the Pre-Socratics*), as revised by Walter Kranz (1934—1937) for the 5th edition. (A 6th edition appeared in 1952, but the standard numeration has been that of the 5th edition.) In Diehl’s work fragments are divided into those *about* the author (preceded by the letter A), and those *by* the author—the actual quotations (preceded by the letter B). All the fragments used here are ‘B’ fragments. In most scholarly work the citation would thus be “B1 DK.” Because each author also is assigned a number—Heraclitus’ number being 22 (12 in the 4th ed.)—the full citation would be “22B1 DK.” The Greek for Heraclitus may be found in Diels.

evidence before us and despite the availability of *Logos* to all people.

This term λόγος (*logos*) is a very important word in Greek philosophy. A robust word, it might simply refer here to the account Heraclitus is offering, which he argues is a true one. But he probably has a grander sense in mind—*Logos* with a capital ‘L’—one referring to a more transcendent voice than his own. In this latter case, *Logos* is a divine ‘Reason’ that organizes and guides reality, makes human rationality possibility, and serves as the criterion of truth.⁶ Indeed, in the second fragment he goes on to say, “But while *Logos* is common to all, the common folk live as if they possess enough wisdom on their own!”⁷ People persistently and perversely prefer their own limited experience, their acquired ‘wisdom’ over the supreme *Logos* that could guide them to the truth.

Heraclitus seems concerned about two fundamental matters: the natural world and the human situation within it. Both are relevant to us because the former is

⁶ Christian readers will likely be familiar with the use of *Logos* in the first verse of the Gospel of John. With respect to Heraclitus, the later philosopher Sextus Empiricus (*Adversus Mathematicos: Against the Logicians*, I.132) interprets *logos* here as the authoritative principal of Reason. Cf. fragment 113.

⁷ Heraclitus, *On Nature*, fragment 2; Greek: τοῦ λόγου δὲ ἐόντος ξυνού ζώουσιν οἱ πολλοὶ ὡς ἰδίαν ἔχοντες φρόνησιν (*ton logon de eontos xunou zōousin hoi polloi hōs idian exhontes phronēsīn*). The Greek οἱ πολλοὶ (*hoi polloi*) refers to the “common folk” (and often was used rather derisively to suggest the uneducated and ignorant masses). The word for “wisdom” here is φρόνησιν (*phronēsīn*), a ‘practical’ wisdom. The sense seems to be Heraclitus dismay (and disdain) for preferring one’s own individual wisdom acquired from unexamined experience to the divine Reason available to all but commonly ignored.

what we need to know and the latter concerns our ability to know it. Of the latter he has confidence; we can know reality. But he has little confidence that most folk will understand it, not because knowledge is foreclosed to them or beyond human capability, but because there exists a profound difference between merely gathering information and actually understanding it.⁸

But let us stay focused on what he sees as characteristic of Nature. We need not be distracted by his notion that the primal element of the universe is fire.⁹ Instead, consider the nature of fire; it is constantly in *flux*. The so-called ‘doctrine of flux’ is crucial to Heraclitus. It is in the nature of things to flow and change.

So we come to his most famous expression, probably known to most people through the version presented by Aristotle’s famous teacher, Plato: “You cannot step twice into the same river.” Like fire, a river’s water is in constant flux. They are constantly moving so that the river changes ceaselessly. Just before offering this quote, Plato’s spokesman, Socrates, had cited another bit of Heraclitus’ thinking: “all things give way to other things, and nothing stands fast.”¹⁰ *Change* appears to be the essence of reality.

Scholars today debate whether Heraclitus actually stressed constant, universal change in the way Plato and then Aristotle (and Aristotle’s successor Theophrastus)

⁸ Heraclitus, *On Nature*, fragment 17: “For the many (*hoi polloi*) do not understand such things, when they come upon them, nor do they know (*ginōskousin*) what they have learned (*mathontes*), but they think they do!” Cf. fragments 40, 41.

⁹ Heraclitus, *On Nature*, fragment 30; cf. fragment 64.

¹⁰ Plato, *Cratylus*, 402a. See Heraclitus, *On Nature*, fragment 91; cf. 49a. With respect to the second quote, cf. fragment 126.

understood him to have done. But the interpretation that such was Heraclitus' teaching became the one generally accepted and it has exercised great influence.

Heraclitus' idea of flux seems to serve a still greater, more fundamental notion: change occurs within a context and that context is movement from one thing to its opposite. For example, as he says at one place, "Things that are cold become warm, warm things become cold, wet things dry, dry things moist."¹¹ Thus the very essence of reality is movement between opposites—things that are contrary to one another.

This is a multidimensional matter. The fragment quoted above reflects change demonstrating opposing states (warm-cold; dry-moist). But Heraclitus also writes, "The sea is water most pure and impure; for fish it is drinkable and life-saving, but for human beings it is undrinkable and very foul."¹² The same thing is, at one and the same moment, salvific and damnable.

So contraries can either exist at different times or at the same time—though in obviously different ways. The connections between opposites might be, as in our first example, successive changes as one state becomes another (warm to cold). Or, as in the next example, the same thing may have opposite effects (sea water as life-giving or deadly). Or, again, some quality of a thing may be judged one way in one context and its opposite in another context (e.g., the same knife that produces suffering can in the hands of a surgeon alleviate it). Another possibility is that a thing might really only be

¹¹ Heraclitus, *On Nature*, fragment 126.

¹² Heraclitus, *On Nature*, fragment 61.

comprehensible by its opposite (e.g., we only know life in contrast to death, sickness in contrast to health).¹³

Yet there is an intrinsic unity among all contrary things. Heraclitus writes, “Things going-toward-and-back are harmonious, and out of their varying comes beauteous union, and all things arise from oppositions.”¹⁴ Change does not disturb this more central truth but is a natural aspect of it. There is in reality not merely change, but a unifying of all change so that contrary qualities can and do exist in each thing.¹⁵

Heraclitus thus acknowledges the human experience of Nature, that which our senses confirm from moment-to-moment. He declares, “As much as what belongs to sight, hearing, learning—these things I give

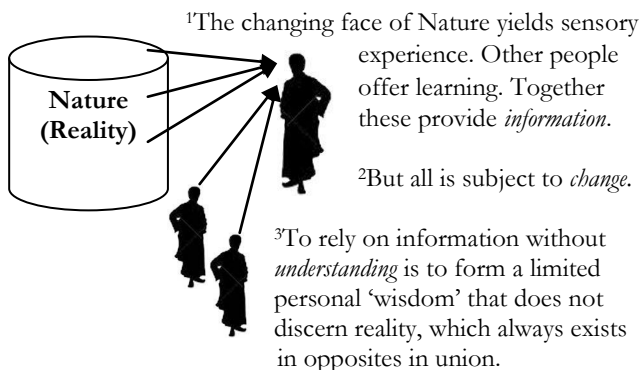
¹³ On kinds of connections between contraries, see Kirk and Raven, *Presocratic Philosophers*, 190. An example of the third kind mentioned is found in fragment 58; the last kind can be seen in fragment 88 (cf. 111).

¹⁴ Heraclitus, *On Nature*, fragment 8; Greek: τὸ ἀντίξουν συμφέρον καὶ ἐκ τῶν διαφερόντων καλλίστην ἁρμονίαν καὶ πάντα κατ’ ἔριν γίνεσθαι. (to *antixoun sympheron kai ek ton diapheronton kallistēn armonian kai panta kat’ erin ginesthai*.) I have translated ἀντίξουν (*antixoun*) as “going-toward-and-back,” to capture the relation to the sense of flux, though the word is often more simply rendered by “opposites.” See Heidegger, *Heraclitus*, 110: “τὸ ἀντί-ξουν—the participial form of ἀντιξέω, to go toward and back—means: going-toward-and-against, as in the jointure of the essential joining of φύσις itself.” The Greek word συμφέρον (*sympheron*) is sometimes translated here as “unity,” so that the opening phrase is “that which is opposite is unity”; perhaps better is Freeman’s “That which is in opposition is in concert,” because “concert” better catches the sense of *sympheron*.

¹⁵ Heraclitus, *On Nature*, fragments 8, 10, 51, 54, 59–61, 67, 88. Wainwright, *Heraclitus*, 6, succinctly writes, “Change is an ontological passage from contrary to contrary—from one perceptible state of being to its opposite.” On kinds of connections between contraries, see Kirk and Raven, *Presocratic Philosophers*, 190.

preference.”¹⁶ Such things provide valuable information on which knowledge can be built. But he also, as we have seen, grasps that just having sense experiences and learning is not enough.¹⁷ One must *understand*.

We might try to capture Heraclitus’ basic position in a picture like this:



Perhaps this is why Heraclitus is so obscure. He is trying to help us avoid simplistic conclusions. The so-called ‘wisdom’ that disdains *Logos* is superficial and leads to people over-valuing what their senses or learning tell them. They have information, but not understanding.

Yet the good news is that knowledge of reality *is* possible. The information is there; the senses matter, discerning change is important, and learning has profit. But all of these things must obey *Logos*. To penetrate to the heart of reality requires an understanding most people find elusive.

¹⁶ Heraclitus, *On Nature*, fragment 55; cf. fragments 7, 101a.

¹⁷ Heraclitus, *On Nature*, fragment 56 warns that even the wisest of men, like Homer, can be deceived by sensory information.

On the other hand, Heraclitus' universe strikes some as *too* complex—as baffling and obscure as the writer who describes it. At the very least, such a universe is an unsettling and challenging one. Not surprisingly, other thinkers rose to contest Heraclitus.

Parmenides

Parmenides of Elea is among those disquieted by Heraclitus. To him the world seen by Heraclitus is a false one; Heraclitus has gone astray. Parmenides has much less confidence in sensory information. Or to put it another way, he is more confident that people relying on it can only go astray. So he champions reason—and reason that follows its own path independent of the supposed truth of sensory information. Reason tells him that perceived change is illusory. His view is of a universe eternally calm, not chaotic.

Parmenides writes using the language of one who has received a divine revelation, giving it a source more authoritative than mere mortal reflection. He sets it down in a poem, making it both grand and ambiguous. In it he us divinely warned that human beings are constantly led astray by a double-mindedness that leads them to falsely conclude that something can both *be* and *not be*. The path of truth, he instead argues, is a single and unified one:

Now there is only one path to speak of
that remains, which is *What is*. And on this path are signs
aplenty, concerning that *what is* is uncreated and eternal,
for it is complete-and-unique, stable and unending.¹⁸

¹⁸ Parmenides, *On Nature*, fragment 8, lines 1–4. The phrase “complete-and-unique” renders the Greek οὐλομελές (*oulomeles*), “com-

Where Heraclitus speaks of beginnings and endings, of change back and forth such that “the sun . . . is new each day,” and “the path up is also the path down,”¹⁹ Parmenides instead says reality is “immovable,” being “without beginning, without end.”²⁰ Where Heraclitus sees flux, Parmenides finds stability.

This vision of reality satisfies human reason in its craving for what is stable and persistent. Parmenides is the great champion of a conception of reality as divinely permanent, unified and sensible. What ‘is’ *is* and cannot be *not is*. Nature is thus both real and dependable, something that can be known and once known relied upon as fixed. Human life can be secure in an orderly universe.

His divine guide says that the logical alternative, a path proclaiming *what is not*, the notion that “*what is not* must necessarily ‘not be,’” is a path “utterly impossible to comprehend.”²¹ How can one know ‘what is not’? So there is a stark choice: start and proceed along a path of seeking to know *what is* or get lost in the darkness of trying to conceive of *what is not*.

This line of reasoning appeals to many people. Yet it has important implications that also disturb many folk. If *what is* must be so sharply contrasted with *what*

plete,” but some manuscripts read instead the word *μονογενές* (*monogenes*)—“the only one of its kind,” or “unique.” The sense may be of something that by its uniqueness is necessarily complete, or whole.

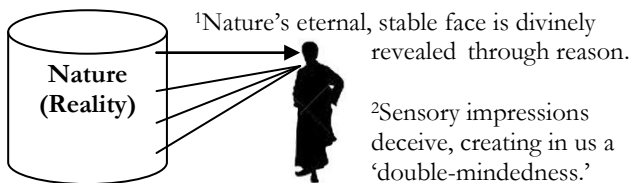
¹⁹ Heraclitus, *On Nature*. First quote, fragment 6; second quote, fragment 60.

²⁰ Parmenides, *On Nature*, fragment 8, lines 26–27: *ἀκίνητον* (*akinēton*) and *ἀναρχον ἀπαυστον* (*anarchon apauston*).

²¹ Parmenides, *On Nature*, fragment 2, lines 5–6.

is not that the former can never be the latter, then all that is real *must* be exactly as it is, without beginning or end, and without change. Anything that *is* cannot come from what *is not*, nor can it ever become what *is not*. Yet this defies our ordinary experience of the world.

We can picture the whole matter this way:



³One must be of one mind with Nature by rejecting the false information of the senses to achieve through reason a true understanding of reality.

Embracing Parmenides' vision comes at a cost. It may be 'sensible' to reason, but it is hardly sensible to the senses! He recognizes this in his poem as his divine guide complains that we mortals are like beings with two contrary heads—double-minded²²: “for hapless, embarrassing perplexity steers the wandering thought in their breast, and they are swept away; deaf and blind, utterly astonished, an undiscerning people. . . .”²³

What is the root of the human problem? According to Parmenides it is the willful holding in one's mind

²² Parmenides, *On Nature*, fragment 6, line 5; the Greek word for “two-headed” or “double-minded” is *δίκρανοι* (*dikranoi*, from *δίκρανος*).

²³ Parmenides, *On Nature*, fragment 6, lines 6–7. The word *ἀμύχανη* (*amēchanē*) has been rendered here as “hapless, embarrassing perplexity.” The simplest translation is “helplessness,” but the kind of helplessness here pictured is better conveyed by a phrase such as I have employed.

two incompatible things as though both were real. Guided by the senses, people conclude that things come into existence and pass away—that changes of all kinds occur. So words and concepts multiply in false beliefs.²⁴ Truth lies in starting on and staying on the true path revealed through reason of a divine unity in which alone is truth.

Heraclitus & Parmenides Together

Which philosopher is the wiser? They seem to offer starkly different pictures of the way the world is and works. Indeed, as influential as each proved to be, they were hardly alone in trying to figure reality out. Later we shall meet another figure of the time—Democritus—whose famous view of reality as “atoms and the space between them” offers yet another thoughtful alternative.

But we need not stray beyond our example to find the essential point that matters to our effort to understand what knowledge is about. *If we cannot discern what the essence of reality is, how likely are we to do well?* If Nature, the world, other people and ourselves obey an essential way of being, we would do well to understand it. For example, if human personality is fixed—stable and enduring—that knowledge will guide us to a different set of expectations and behaviors than if we decide personality is something in flux and the union of opposites. Knowing what really is matters; it is practical.

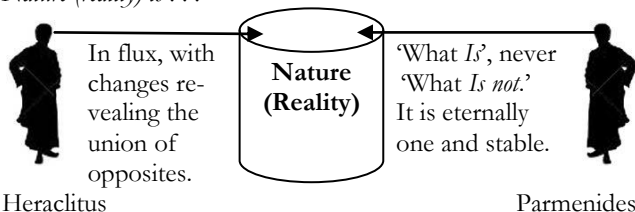
Heraclitus and Parmenides both mount persuasive cases—and certainly each persuaded enough people to have gained historical traction that has made them

²⁴ Parmenides, *On Nature*, fragment 8, lines 38–41. In fragment 1, line 30 he uses *δόξα* (*doxa*), which we will see is an important term.

famous down to our own day. But who is right? Is either correct?

Let's pause long enough to take a deep breath and try to get to the heart of their competing claims. We might contrast Heraclitus and Parmenides this way:

Nature (reality) is . . .



Can these views of reality be at all compatible? If so, then perhaps we are not so poorly off after all.

While it seems Parmenides and Heraclitus could not be more opposite in their ideas about the nature of reality, we must avoid exaggerating their differences, not only in light of only possessing fragmentary evidence for both, but even with respect to what that evidence presents.²⁵

Martin Heidegger, in the 20th century, challenges the easy identification of Heraclitus as the advocate of change as Nature's essence and of Parmenides as the

²⁵ See, for example, the warning in Wainwright, *Heraclitus*, 102–3. On the other hand, as he points out, they hold clearly opposing views to a significant degree. Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides*, 28, depicts them as both in rebellion to a 6th century B.C.E. assumption of an original One Being from whom emerges a manifold world. He sees Heraclitus and Parmenides as both rejecting this view, though from very different perspectives. Heraclitus emphasizes the flux so that no stable substance persists, while Parmenides adheres to one stable and unified Being from whom it is impossible that the kind of flux Heraclitus finds can proceed or be viewed as possessing.

champion of permanence as the essence of reality. He points out that history's subsequent tendency to set thinkers in fundamental opposition leads to false conclusions; we miss underlying similarities or agreements.²⁶

Consider, for example, that both Heraclitus and Parmenides are pessimistic about how human beings actually think most of the time. Heraclitus finds people too fond of their own limited learning and fact gathering, while Parmenides accuses them of being double-minded. Yet human beings remain a critical element in the thinking of both of them. Though their mutual interest is in describing the nature of reality, neither pursues that task as though it is something that exists apart from human beings and their capacity for knowledge. It is a *human* struggle to understand.

Parmenides, like Heraclitus, contends that there exists something—either *Logos* (Heraclitus), or νόος (*noos*, “mind” or “thought” (Parmenides))—that is available to all, typically used incorrectly (if at all) by people, yet supremely employed by the guiding hand of deity. Heraclitus links *noos* with *Logos*.²⁷ Both appear to empha-

²⁶ See Heidegger, *Heraclitus*, and especially, *Parmenides*. In the latter, he argues, “we would be prey to coarse falsifications if we interpreted the thinking of Parmenides and Heraclitus with the help of modern ‘dialectics,’ claiming that in the primordial thinking of the Greeks the ‘oppositional’ and even the basic opposition of Being and Nothing ‘plays a role.’” (p. 19). Beaufret, *Dialogue with Heidegger*, 30, puts it this way: “If Parmenides is the thinker of being, we can understand now that this thinking of being overshadows change no more than a thinking of change, such as Heraclitus conceives it, destabilizes a fundamental permanence.”

²⁷ Heraclitus, *On Nature*, fragment 114. On the link between *noos* and *logos* in this fragment, see Sullivan, *Psychological and Ethical Ideas*, 30.

ize *noos* as the “understanding” a mind can achieve—a cognitive degree above just “thought.” The relationship between these terms in both authors remains the subject of discussion in scholarly circles,²⁸ but there is an underlying conviction shared by them that such a power—by whatever name—separates those who understand reality from those that do not.

Each discerns a fundamental sense of permanence, purpose, and unity within reality. Though we glimpsed his sense of the unity in opposites, the other two notions can be easy to miss in Heraclitus. Yet, he says of the universe (κόσμον, “cosmos”) that “it is forever—past, present, and future.”²⁹ Similarly, he declares, “One thing is wisdom: to grasp the intention which guides all things at all times.”³⁰

Parmenides, too, finds a divine hand guiding all, writing that “in the midst of these things deity steers

She writes, “We see a special role given to *noos*: it appears as the perception or discernment that grasps what *logos* is and leads to a specific form of speech, one that will best reflect the essence of *logos*.” Also see p. 67.

²⁸ Nikoletseas, *Parmenides*, 13, for example, argues that “Parmenides took the core of Heraclitus’ thought, *logos*, renamed it, and subsequently took many of the ‘images’ of Heraclitus’ thought and processed them in a variant *mise-en-scène*.” This is a position that has not gained much traction but does serve to point at the connections scholars find between Heraclitus and Parmenides.

²⁹ Heraclitus, *On Nature*, fragment 30.

³⁰ Heraclitus, *On Nature*, fragment 41. The Greek γνώμην (*gnōmēn*), is translated here as “intention,” i.e., something purposeful (and so “purpose” is another acceptable rendering). My choice of “grasp” for ἐπίστασθαι (*epistasthai*) relies on the English reader to see in it a cognitive “understanding”—to “know” firmly. Because ὅτεν (*hotēn*) adds a sense of time, I translate πάντα διὰ πάντων (*panta dia pantōn*) with reference to a continuous guidance of everything.

all.”³¹ We saw above his conviction that the universe is uncreated and eternal. As to the unity of all things, though Parmenides places unity in Being, and Heraclitus instead reasons it differently, they can at least formally agree such unity exists.³²

Neither Heraclitus nor Parmenides (nor, for that matter, Democritus) thinks of a ‘multiverse’ nor imagines multiple realities. For them the universe is one, the place where we all reside, and one that can be grasped. They may have different degrees of confidence in how likely it is people will grasp reality, and over which tools available (e.g., sense-perception and reason) might be best trusted, but neither of them disparage the possibility of true knowledge of real things.

In fact, if we take a step back we may see that in one very fundamental way Heraclitus, Parmenides, Democritus and many other thinkers are more alike than different: each is persuaded he has the truth that eludes most other people! Philosophers can be as dogmatic as churchmen in insisting that only those who agree with them have the truth. In this light we may need to rethink our basic picture of the situation.

³¹ Parmenides, *On Nature*, fragment 12, line 3. The δαίμων (*daimōn*), which in later Christian use became associated almost exclusively with ‘demons,’ was in Classical Greek times a more versatile word. It could, as it does here, refer to a deity (whether god or goddess) manifesting divine power; in Parmenides’ poem the guiding divinity is a goddess. Often the term was used to refer to that force or power which guides the destiny of an individual.

³² This point is made by Bossi, “What Heraclitus and Parmenides Have in Common,” 23, who adds, “Parmenides would agree that ‘all things are one’ in the sense that ‘being is one’, and reciprocally, Heraclitus would have understood the statement that ‘there is only being’ means that ‘all things are one.’”

Let's redraw an earlier illustration to show an adjusted possibility:



In this corner . . . Heraclitus & Parmenides

and in this corner . . . the masses

In a very real sense, Heraclitus and Parmenides are in a tag team wrestling match with the ignorant masses!

Perhaps the most powerful agreement between Heraclitus and Parmenides is that knowing reality is *not* easy. Heraclitus reminds us that we have a tendency to settle for our individual 'wisdom' and not look beyond it. Parmenides reminds us that we easily form double-minded sentiments, confuse ourselves, and substitute beliefs for knowledge. Yet they agree this is neither inevitable nor necessary.

The Impasse

Now consider where all this wrangling has left us. While not having much confidence in the masses, it is easy enough to see why the masses might not have much confidence in the philosophers either. While an earnest seeker after truth might torturously extract some agreement from among disputing scholars, the differences seem both more apparent and more potent. If we need to understand reality—really *know* it—to survive and prosper, then perhaps we are in trouble.

The ancient Greeks felt the pinch. What really makes the world go 'round? If we depend on stability

and order, but the universe is change and chaos, we are unlikely to do well. On the other hand, if we assume that all is flux and change, but it turns out that perception is illusory, then those illusions are going to blind us to the truth. The stakes are high.

Few of us are going to be content with a few forced commonalities. Since survival itself depends on a reasonably accurate grasp of reality, then we are right to want to know the proverbial ‘truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.’ But after weighing the arguments of Heraclitus and Parmenides we might well have increased sympathy for those who avoid the kind of examination Socrates commended!

Somehow, most human beings manage to know enough about reality to keep themselves alive and to do relatively well. Yet Aristotle seems right in saying we also stretch toward knowledge. However much we have, we want more. Heraclitus and Parmenides may have been right that it isn’t easy to grasp reality, but we are sure they are right, too, that it *can* be understood.

Among the ancient Greeks the cumulative effect of the debates about the reality of things—what we today collect under the heading of “metaphysics”—was to produce a growing sense that before one can figure out the world one must better determine what knowledge is and how it is possible. If the *aim* of knowledge is truth about reality, and the *source* of knowledge comes from what reality provides as information about itself, neither of these tells us what the *nature* of knowledge is.

So some ancient Greek philosophers reoriented themselves. They turned with fresh vigor to the task of *epistemology*, the study of what knowledge it and how knowing occurs.

Chapter 2

What Is Knowledge?

Protagoras vs. Plato

Still in the 5th century B.C.E., after the appearance of the works of Heraclitus and Parmenides, but while the full force of the impasse their ideas created was being felt, another figure stirred himself and entered the conversation. His name is Protagoras of Abdera (c. 481–c. 411 B.C.E.), a learned ‘Sophist’—“wise one”—a professional devoted to teaching people how to speak persuasively, live well, and develop good character.

Protagoras’ Provocative Proposal

A popular figure, Protagoras proved an able advocate of the common fellow, a champion of the masses that Heraclitus and Parmenides seemed to have such scorn for. We may redraw our earlier picture again:



In this corner . . . Heraclitus and Parmenides

and in this corner . . . Protagoras for the masses

While Protagoras seems more persuaded by the view of Heraclitus than that of Parmenides, he is mostly disinterested in determining what reality *is* in any objective way. His interest, in line with his practical concerns as a teacher, is with reality as it *appears to be*.

Protagoras reassures his fellow citizens of ancient Greece that, contrary to the doubts of Heraclitus and Parmenides, they can and should trust their own experiences of reality. While those earlier philosophers had been concerned both with reality and with how human beings can know it, their attention had been more on the former than the latter. Protagoras shifts the weight to *knowing* and argues, in effect, that the reason it may be hard to choose between Heraclitus and Parmenides is because *they are both right*.

Now this may seem a little hard to swallow. We are accustomed to thinking that when it comes to objective truth there is in any argument between opposing sides a ‘right’ side and a ‘wrong’ one. But remember: Protagoras isn’t focused on objective reality. He is focused on subjective reality—the actual experience of reality that people have moment-to-moment. In fact, later Skeptic philosophers—who liked to balance debates by showing both sides were equally plausible—could appeal to him as a forerunner; the biographer Diogenes Laertius writes, “Protagoras was the first to say that concerning every matter there are two arguments (*logous*), each opposed to the other; and he was the first to show this in practice.”³³

How can Protagoras see opposites as equally true? The clue is in his most famous declaration: “Man is the measure of all things—of those things that are, about their existence; of things that are not, about their non-existence.”³⁴ In the late 2nd century of the Common

³³ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Protagoras*, IX.51 [*Protagoras*, 3]: The Greek λόγους (*logous*) is a form of λόγος (*logos*).

³⁴ Plato, *Theatetus*, 152a: Greek: φησὶ γάρ που ‘πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον’ ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, ‘τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστι, τῶν δὲ μὴ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν.’

Era, the philosopher Sextus Empiricus (c. 160–c. 210 C.E.) offered his explanation of this saying.

By ‘measure’ (*metron*) he means ‘criterion’ (*kritērion*), and by ‘things’ he means ‘perceived objects,’ so he is actually saying, ‘Man is the criterion of all perceived objects, of those things that are, about their existence; of things that are not, about their nonexistence.’ As a result, he concerns himself only with appearances (*phainomena*) to each individual person, by which he makes all things relative.³⁵

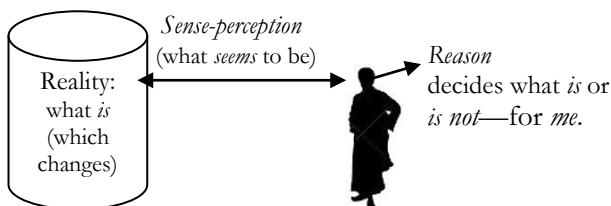
If Sextus Empiricus is right, Protagoras intends us to think that everything is measured with human beings as the yardstick. All of reality is measured with human beings in mind, and every judgment of reality is a human one. This is how he accomplishes his shift away from *things* to *human beings*—placing us in the center of reality and making what *we* know what matters most.

Sextus Empiricus terms this ‘relativism’ and such is the name by which Protagoras’ position is known. All things are relative to humanity, and every individual member of the species is a yardstick of reality. What is true and “real” is what is “real” for each individual.

(*phēsi gar pou “pantōn chrēmātōn metron” anthrōpo einai, “tōn men ontōn hōs esti, tōn de mē ontōn hōs ouk estin.”*)

³⁵ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (*Pyrrhōneioi hypotyposēis*), I.32.216–217. [The citation is to book [I], chapter [32], and sections in the Greek [216–217]. The phrase “perceived objects” translates *πραγμάτων* (*pragmatōn*), which can mean simply ‘things’ in general. See also I.32.218–219, where Sextus expands on Protagoras’ view, which includes grounding all appearances in matter (real objects) and that all perception is context-dependent. “Appearances” (*phainomena*) are “that which appears”; we shall see much more on this term later.

Protagoras accepts Heraclitus' approval of the human senses, which register the world as a changing one. He also, like both Heraclitus and Parmenides, accepts a role for reason, seeing that human beings think about what they experience. But he is far more optimistic about the thinking of the masses; it can be trusted. As for Parmenides, Protagoras accepts the challenge to consider both *what is* and *what is not*, rejecting Parmenides' one true path in favor of letting each human being decide such matters—and doing so truthfully. We may picture his resulting position like this:



The 'for *me*' in the above illustration is central.

Socrates Considers Protagoras' Proposal

A little later than Protagoras, Socrates (c. 470–399 B.C.E.) in a discussion with a young man named Theaetetus, who has accepted Protagoras' view, repeats Protagoras' famous saying and captures the heart of its sentiment: "In effect, then, does he not say that any particular thing *is* as it *appears* to me, and just so any given thing is as it appears to you, as well, because 'man' applies to both of us?"³⁶

The reason Socrates' summation matters is that he gets that the practical effect of Protagoras' view is to

³⁶ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 152a.

equate individual perception with knowledge. Socrates points out that if sense-perception (in Greek, αἴσθησις (*aisthēsis*)) is the same as the “appearance” (Greek φαντασία (*phantasia*)) of a thing to a human individual, then while Protagoras may focus on what *seems* or *appears* to be the case, for the individual this is the same as what actually *is*. The person’s judgment has elevated individual belief about reality to a declaration of knowledge about what is real.

Protagoras thus links metaphysics to epistemology in a manner favoring the priority of the latter. We might reduce his proposal to a formula:

Knowledge = perception (= ‘appearing to be’ to an individual)

Now quite often this effect has little import and we have no trouble accepting it. For example, Socrates points to the varying experience of two individuals exposed to a night breeze. One feels slightly chilled by it while the other finds it intolerably cold. Is the actual objective temperature important in such a situation? What seems to matter is the *perceived* reality—and that varies from one person to the next. Why shouldn’t we agree that both perceivers are equally right?³⁷

But metaphysics is not so easily set aside. Socrates sees in Protagoras’ position the influence of Heraclitus’ notions that everything is in flux, that it changes, and that, in fact, nothing is only one way of being but always a union of opposites. So, he argues, we can’t really talk about a thing as ‘being’ but only as ‘becoming.’³⁸

³⁷ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 152b.

³⁸ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 152c–e. Cf. 170a: “Does he not say, ‘what *seems* the case to each person *is* to that person as he supposes it to be?’”

Socrates renews his attention to Protagoras' famous maxim, but now puts his thoughts about it in a somewhat different manner:

For if what each person believes (*doxazē*) results from his or her perception and so will be true for him or her, and if no one is better than anyone else in deciding such, and if also no one is in position to pass judgment on someone else's belief (*doxan*) as true or false, and—as has been repeatedly said—each person is to have his or her own beliefs (*doxasei*) unique to him- or herself, and in all cases such are right and true³⁹

Although I've broken off in mid-stride of Socrates' speech,⁴⁰ what we need to see here is the restatement of Protagoras' position and the appearance of a highly significant word: *δόξα* (*doxa*)—"belief." The essence of the word, which can be variously translated, is "the taking up of a position."⁴¹ Doing so expresses confident trust that one's position is correct.

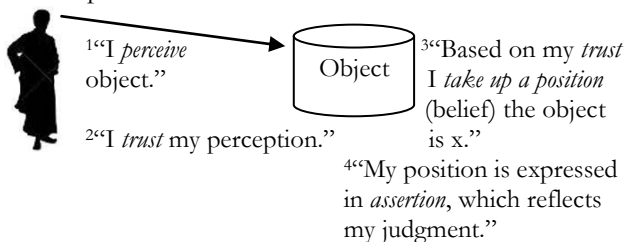
Greek: τὸ δοκοῦν ἐκάστῳ τοῦτο καὶ εἶναι φησί που ὃ δοκεῖ; (*to dokoun hekastō touto kai einai phesi pou hō dokei?*)

³⁹ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 161d. Forms of our key Greek words in this passage are: "believes" (*δοξάζω*, *doxazō*); "perception" (*αἰσθήσεως*, *aisthēsēs*); "belief" (*δόξαν*, *doxan*); and "beliefs" (*δοξάσει*, *doxasei*).

⁴⁰ The rest of the quote is: "then how in the world, my friend, can Protagoras be so wise that he is judged to be a teacher worthy of being paid very well, while we are regarded as ignoramuses who must be schooled by him, even though each person is (supposedly) the measure of his or her own wisdom?!?"

⁴¹ The noun *doxa* (*δόξα*) derives from the verb *dokeō* (*δοκέω*), "to suppose," or "to hold an opinion." This makes it cousin to the verb *dechomai* (*δέχομαι*), "to take hold of" or "to take up," which less literally can mean to hold an idea, i.e., a belief or an opinion. Another verb, *doxazō* (*δοξάζω*; infinitive form, *doxazein* (*δοξάζειν*)), "to hold an opinion," or "to suppose," derives from *doxa*. All told, this family has a number of ways to express a basic concept related to

To capture more fully how *doxa* operates we need another picture:



Belief begins with some perception (and we need not limit it to sense-perception). That perception is trusted, which by thinking leads to taking up a position about what the perception means (e.g., "I am hot" or "I am cold," or "I should vote for *x* because of *y*.")—and this is belief. By their nature beliefs are experienced as persuasive and want to infect others, so they are expressed in assertions, whether in statement form or by deed.

This portrayal seems to fit Protagoras' conception of what human beings do. A person has a sense-perception and in thinking forms a position, which is a decision (or judgment) about how a thing appears-to-be. Accordingly, we must adjust the above formula just a bit:

$$\begin{aligned} \textit{Knowledge} &= \textit{perception} \text{ (= 'appearing to be' to an individual)} \\ &= \textit{belief} \text{ (doxa)} \end{aligned}$$

In simple shorthand:

$$\textit{Knowledge} = \textit{belief}$$

acts of thinking where a position is taken whether based on knowledge or not. The word is also used by Parmenides.

Disquieting Implications of Protagoras' Position

Yikes! Put this way, it may be easier to see why Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and others find Protagoras' view worrisome. If every belief is equally true, and all belief is knowledge, then epistemology is reduced to a purely subjective experience where the best we can do is sit around the campfire and share our personal beliefs, hoping to persuade someone to change their belief despite having no better grounds for doing so than that our belief *seems* better *to us*. What passes as 'dialog' is actually just shouting into the wind with no one interested in anything more than persuading others.

To be fair, Protagoras is not unaware of the perils of his position. He proposes, for example, that while all belief are equally *true* they may not be equally *beneficial*. In fact, he sees the purpose of persuasion—and thus the justification for teaching people how to be more persuasive—resting in the fact that some beliefs lend themselves to better outcomes than do others. For example, the belief that peppermint candy may cure an upset stomach, based on the experience it *seemed* to do so one time, may not in the long term be as healthy a belief as one taking the position that when the stomach is upset a person learned in medicine might be good to consult. The physician's belief may not be any more true than the sick person's, but might be more advantageous in changing experience for the better.⁴²

Nevertheless, most of us are not content to simply set the quest for objective knowledge to one side. We still want to know what really *is* and is for everybody.

⁴² Plato, *Theaetetus*, 166c–167d.

Socrates' Skepticism

As we have seen, in Plato's dialog titled *Theaetetus*, Socrates probes Protagoras' proposal after Theaetetus offers as his understanding of knowledge that it is simply a matter of relativistic perception. Because of Socrates' keen questioning, Theaetetus concludes knowledge cannot simply be equated with belief. Instead, he says, knowledge must be *true* belief. This idea prompts a new line of discussion focused on the fact that if there is true belief there must also be false belief, but trying to establish how such is even possible proves elusive. Simply distinguishing knowledge as true belief does not work.⁴³

Socrates presses Theaetetus to come up with some other notion. After a bit, Theaetetus remembers something he once heard. He now repeats it and in doing so provides perhaps the most famous definition of knowledge found in classical philosophy: “‘He said, ‘Only with sufficient grounds can true belief be knowledge; belief absent adequate grounds stands outside knowledge.’ Thus, a thing without adequate explanation is not ‘knowable’—and he used that very term—while a thing that is sufficiently supported is knowable.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 186a–200c.

⁴⁴ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 201c–d. To highlight the key Greek terms, here is the same translation with the key parts in quotes and Greek following: Only with ‘sufficient grounds’ (λόγου, *logou*) can ‘true belief’ (ἀληθὴ δόξαν, *alēthē doxan*) be ‘knowledge’ (ἐπιστήμην, *epistēmēn*); belief ‘absent adequate grounds’ (ἄλογον, *alogon*) stands outside ‘knowledge’ (ἐπιστήμης, *epistēmēs*). Thus, a thing without ‘adequate explanation’ (λόγος, *logos*) is not ‘knowable’ (ἐπιστητά, *epistēta*)—and he used that very term—while a thing that is ‘sufficiently supported’ (λόγος, *logos*) is ‘knowable’ (ἐπιστητά, *epistēta*). (The word *logos* does not appear this last time but is necessary in context.)

Thus there forms a new equation, so famous in philosophy:

Knowledge (*epistēmē*) = Belief (*doxa*), when belief is:
[1] true (*alēthē*) and [2] warranted (*logon*).

Two conditions must be met by belief to be knowledge. Can they be met?

Note that this definition is from Theaetetus, not Socrates as many people presume. Socrates at once does what Socrates does—ask questions to fully flesh out the idea and then test it. It quickly is apparent that the key element is that of a “warrant” or “justification” for a belief. Here we find that important Greek word *logos* again. Socrates suggests that when the word is used with reference to providing an adequate account or rationale for something three possible senses might be in view:

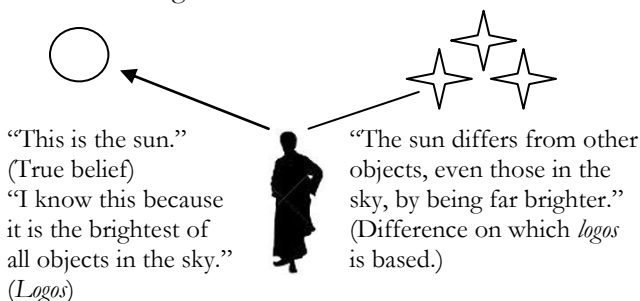
1. *Logos* = vocalizing in language a reflection of the thing believed.
2. *Logos* = answering a query by listing the parts making up a thing.
3. *Logos* = an account of how the thing differs from other things.⁴⁵

The ensuing discussion soon comes to focus on the third of these as the best alternative. Most people, Socrates suggests, will probably see *logos* in its proper sense here as expressing the distinguishing characteristic(s) of a thing. Doing so is unlikely to be the example of a lucky guess and instead indicate genuine know-

⁴⁵ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 206c–210b.

ledge. He offers the example of the sun; the *logos* is that it is the brightest object in the sky of all the objects that circle the earth.

This strongest case looks like this:



Thus the formula should be understood as:

$$\text{Knowledge} = \text{true belief} + \textit{logos}$$

(based on distinctive difference)

Socrates then supplements this with another example: his knowledge of Theaetetus. But this second example demonstrates some problems with this way of looking at knowledge. What makes Theaetetus different from all others such that when Socrates sees him on the street he “knows” him to be Theaetetus and not, for instance, Theodorus? Such a difference is elusive; any particular suggestion (e.g., his distinctive nose, or prominent eyes) probably fits a number of other people, too. So somehow one must take all such possible differences and make each uniquely tied to Theaetetus. This means each individual feature must also be recognized as different from every other person who has a similar feature—*this* nose belongs to Theaetetus and no other, even though similar noses are found on others. It is easy to see how one can get caught up into an endless

cycle of making distinctions in order to “know” something.

Socrates argues that all such activity presupposes one already knows what makes Theaetetus unique! So the whole matter is a bit like a blind man advising someone to pick up something he or she is already holding. In essence, Theaetetus’ third definition is really this formula:

Knowledge is true belief *plus a knowledge of differentness*.

How does that help? It is absurd to say, as this turns out to do, “Knowledge is true belief plus knowledge.”⁴⁶

In a different dialog written by Plato, named *Meno*, Socrates points out that sometimes there is no practical advantage to knowledge over true belief. For example, if one consults two guides as to how to get somewhere, the knowledge of one is of no more use than the belief of the other if the latter’s belief is true. Both persons are reliable enough guides.

Why prefer knowledge to belief then? Socrates argues that the decisive difference is one quality: *certainty*. Knowledge is *securely fastened* so that it sticks around. It is *certain* in that it is *secure*. Beliefs change, and come and go, but knowledge lasts forever. What makes it stick? The notion seems to be that is its *logos*—the rational grounds supporting the belief. In this manner Socrates admits the possibility of Theaetetus’ third definition.⁴⁷

Plato’s Position

Interestingly enough, when Socrates seems in *Meno* to admit the possibility of knowledge as true, warranted

⁴⁶ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 208b–210b.

⁴⁷ Plato, *Meno*, 97a–98b.

belief, he says, “Of course, I do not know this; I am only making a conjecture. On the other hand, that ‘right belief’ is other than ‘knowledge’ is an altogether different matter; I am not guessing about that! If I am to claim I ‘know’ anything—and I don’t suppose that about much—this is one such matter.”⁴⁸

Plato (427–347 B.C.E.) concurs with his teacher on this matter of seeing knowledge as clearly different from belief. It is *Plato’s* Socrates that contests Protagoras—and separating out Plato from his mentor can be challenging. But it seems reasonably clear that Plato comes to relatively more confidence in what can be said about what knowledge is than did Socrates. In fact, in this respect Plato seems bolstered by another great influence on his thinking: Parmenides.⁴⁹

Plato is most famous for his theory of eternal “Forms”—transcendent abstractions that as eternal ideas are the ultimate reality. These Forms (or Ideas) look a lot like Parmenides Being: so stable as to be properly called unchangeable, eternal, discernible by reason (but not directly by the senses), and related to the Divine.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 98a–b. What fixes to the ground true belief is *logismō* (λογισμῶ, from λογισμός), an account or reason why for believing. The quote is from 98b, where again we have “right belief” (*orthodoxa*) and “knowledge” (*epistēmē*).

⁴⁹ Palmer, *Plato’s Reception of Parmenides*, 3, declares at the outset of his book, “Parmenides is, after Socrates, the philosopher who exercised the greatest influence on Plato’s thought.”

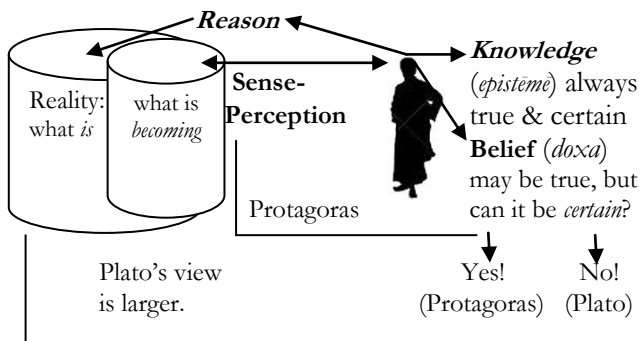
⁵⁰ Plato, *Phaedo*, 78d–80a. Palmer, *Plato’s Reception of Parmenides*, 5, discusses the similarity of Plato’s description of the Forms to Parmenides’ talk about Being. The term “Forms” is less misleading than the alternative word “Ideas,” because the Forms have real and independent existence; they are more than just mental constructs.

The quality of certainty that Socrates points at as distinguishing knowledge from belief is important to Plato as well—and it echoes the same sense of certainty conveyed by Parmenides. The word Plato focuses upon as “knowledge” is the Greek ἐπιστήμη (*epistēmē*), the very word Socrates challenges Theaetetus to define.

Though Greek has many words for “to know” (verb) and “knowledge” (noun), *epistēmē* emerges as the most important one. It is the kind of “knowledge” that Socrates and Plato seek, and one of its characteristics as they understand it is certainty. Another way to express this is that opposite Protagoras—but in line with Parmenides—Plato is concerned with *objective* knowledge.

Protagoras equates sense-perception with belief (allowing reason to form judgments) and calls this “knowledge” that is always true for the individual—a subjective view of knowledge. Plato articulates an objective view that prioritizes reason, reserves sense-perception to a subordinate status, and distinguishes belief in nature from knowledge, which must be true and certain for all people at all times.

We can contrast Plato and Protagoras thusly:



In agreement with Socrates, Plato contends that Protagoras is only seeing part of the picture—the part (consistent with Heraclitus’ view) that is changing (*becoming*). But because knowledge, for Plato, is about that which is fixed and secure (i.e., “certain”), it must be like Parmenides’ Being—eternal and stable. And that leads to Plato’s famous *theory of recollection*.⁵¹

In the *Phaedo* a brief exchange between two of Socrates’ companions helps set out its basic ideas:

CEBES: Truly, Socrates, the theory you often have talked to us about—that knowledge acquired through learning is nothing other than recollection—if true, must mean that what we recollect now we had to have learned at some earlier time. That is impossible unless the *psyche* of each of us previously existed somewhere before it came into the human shape; this suggests that the *psyche* is immortal.

SIMMIAS: But Cebes, what arguments support this? Remind me as I am at a loss at the moment to recall them.

CEBES: One excellent argument is that when people are asked questions, if they are asked well enough, they answer fully from what they have—and they could not do so unless they possessed already both knowledge (*epistēmē*) and a correct *logos* (*orthos logos*).⁵²

⁵¹ Philosopher Jon Moline offers a concise description of recollection’s nature and role when he writes, “Recollection is a process by which answers are held to be apply to supply *true* opinions on matters on which they have not been instructed. Recollection explains how the Socratic method or any other method is able to bring people into a condition of episteme. It is not itself a method, but rather a very tentative notion of the ontological and psychological basis on which philosophical methods can work.” Moline, “Recollection, dialectic, and ontology,” 234f.

⁵² Plato, *Phaedo*, 72e–73b. The phrase “knowledge acquired through learning” translates the noun μάθησις (*mathēsis*). The word “learned” translates μεμαθηκέναι (*memathekenai*, fr. *manthanō*).

“Learning”—aided best by Socrates’ dialectical method of asking questions to first flesh out a subject and then test it—helps the human mind “recollect” the knowledge the human *psyche* had before birth. Note, too, that our word *logos* has reappeared. Later, Socrates pointedly asks, “Can not a person who has knowledge give *logos* to what he knows?”⁵³

In Plato’s masterpiece, the *Republic*, he looks closely at the relation of belief to knowledge. In the following excerpt we can see the influence of Parmenides as Plato’s Socrates dialogs with his companion:

SOCRATES: Would we not be right in calling the thinking of this man, because he *knows*, “knowledge,” while the other fellow’s thought is mere “belief” (*doxan*), because he only *believes* what is the case?

GLAUCON: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: What if this second fellow argues with us, disputing our conclusion? Can we offer him some soothing solace, while gently persuading him, and without disclosing to him that his thinking is disordered?

GLAUCON: That would certainly be advisable.

SOCRATES: Come, then, and let us figure what we may say to him. Shall we start with the assurance that whatever he does know is most welcome and that we are pleased about his knowing it? But then we would also like to hear from him the answer to this: Does anyone who has knowledge, know *something* or *nothing*? Please, Glaucon, answer on his behalf.

GLAUCON: I shall answer, ‘He knows something.’

SOCRATES: Is this something what *is* or *is not*?

⁵³ Plato, *Phaedo*, 76b. Greek: ἀνὴρ ἐπιστάμενος περὶ ὧν ἐπίσταται ἔχει ἀνδοῦναι λόγον ἢ οὐ; (*Anēr epistamenos peri hōn epistatai echoi an dounai logon ē ou?*)

GLAUCON: It must be something that *is* for how can something that *is not* be known?

SOCRATES: Are we confident of this conclusion, no matter how many ways we consider it, that what actually *is* can entirely be known, while what *is not* cannot be known?

GLAUCON: We may be sure of it.

SOCRATES: Very well. Now, if there is something somehow of a nature to be both *is* and *is not*, will it not then take a place between these two states of *is* and *is not*?

GLAUCON: Yes. It would be between them.

SOCRATES: So, just as “knowledge” (γνῶσις, *gnosis*) corresponds to what *is*, and “ignorance” (ἄγνοσία, *agnosia*) to what *is not*, then must there also be some state between knowledge and ignorance, one corresponding to the state between *is* and *is not*—if, in fact, such an intermediate state exists?

GLAUCON: Indeed.

SOCRATES: Can we say that “belief” (*doxan*) is something?

GLAUCON: Of course.

SOCRATES: Is “belief” a mental power the same as “knowledge” (ἐπιστήμη, *epistēmē*), or different?

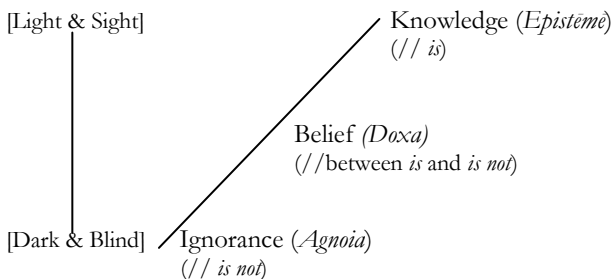
GLAUCON: Different.

SOCRATES: Then it follows that “belief” (*doxa*) and “knowledge” (*epistēmē*) each depend on different kinds of things and that this difference corresponds to a difference in the mental powers employed.

GLAUCON: Yes, that is the case.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Plato’s *Republic*, V.476d–477b; cf. through 480a. Key words in Socrates’ first remark: “thinking” (διάνοιαν, *dianoian*); “knows,” (γινώσκοντος, *gignōskontos* (fr. γινώσκω, *gignōsko*)) [the second ‘g’ I silent]; “knowledge” (γνώμην, *gnōmēn*); “belief” (δόξαν, *doxan*); “believes” (δοξάζοντος, *doxazontos* (fr. δοξάζω, (*doxazō*)). The last word,

This set of exchanges establishes a kind of scale ranging from “ignorance” (*agnosia*) at its bottom, up through “belief” (*doxa*), to the ultimate: “knowledge” (*epistēmē*). A little after this portion of the *Republic* we find Plato’s Socrates using metaphorical language to make his meaning clearer. He says of belief that it is “darker than knowledge, but lighter than ignorance.”⁵⁵ Yet a little later, Socrates likens the contrast between just knowledge and belief as like that between one who can see and one who is blind!⁵⁶ Building on this metaphorical portrayal, we can picture the resulting Platonic scheme as a kind of parallelism (signified by //) imagined between epistemological states and Parmenides’ metaphysical ones:



The contrast between belief and knowledge is heightened dramatically by Plato when Socrates is chided by his companion Adeimantus for his reluctance

“believes” has the sense of “supposes.” Cf. Plato, *Gorgias*, 454c–d on the difference between knowledge and belief.

⁵⁵ Plato’s *Republic*, V.478c–d. In this passage two words for “knowledge”—*epistēmē* and *gnosis*—are used synonymously. From Socrates on, the term *epistēmē* was preferred. The exact difference between *epistēmē* and *gnosis* has been debated.

⁵⁶ Plato’s *Republic*, VI.484c.

to put forth his own view of knowledge. The two engage in the following exchange:

SOCRATES: Do you think it fair to say one knows something one does not know?

ADEIMANTUS: Of course not, at least not as one “knows” it. But one ought to be willing to say what he “believes,” as his belief.

SOCRATES: What?! Have you not noticed that beliefs (*doxas*) apart from knowledge (*epistēmēs*) are reproachful? The best of such are blind—or do you think that those who offer a true belief without understanding are somehow different from those blind folk who just happen to select the right path?⁵⁷

Plato thus accomplishes two things: first, he separates belief from knowledge by their respective natures, and second, he allows for their connection so long as belief is subordinate—kept in its proper place. But to see that proper place and flesh out what *epistēmē* is now leads Plato to his most famous presentation on the matter—his ‘fixed line.’

Plato, like Parmenides, wants to correlate metaphysics with epistemology. He presents a picture of this by depicting two domains: the world encountered by our senses and a higher one inhabited by the eternal Forms. Just as an imagined line is fixed between these metaphysical realities so a line is fixed between our “knowledge” of each.

⁵⁷ Plato’s *Republic*, VI.506c. Socrates’ opening question uses *eidota* (εἰδότες, fr. οἶδα (*oída*)) for “knows” and *mē oiden* (μὴ οἶδεν, again a form of *oída*) for “does not know.” The phrase “without understanding” here is meant to suggest that the kind of true belief that lacks *logos*.

Drawing on the kind of language we saw a short bit ago, Plato's Socrates invites his listeners as follows:

Take what we have said about the eyes with reference to the *psyche*: when the *psyche* fixes upon what is illuminated by truth and what is real, it apprehends, and knows, and appears to possess understanding. But when it fixes upon what is mingled with darkness, on what comes into being and then passes away, it believes and its sight is dimmed; it bounces among beliefs (*doxas*) and appears to have no understanding.⁵⁸

Plato has confidence that truth illumines what *is*—the metaphysical reality Heraclitus and Parmenides sought—and that thereby knowledge can be achieved. But this requires the light of reason. When people rely on sense perceptions they are—in his words—‘fixing upon what is mingled with darkness.’ That darkness results from the lack of certainty and clarity associated with a world of becoming, of things seemingly coming into existence, changing, and passing away. When sight is fixed on such things knowledge isn't possible and all one is left with are beliefs, which themselves change.

The world open to the senses is a murky one compared to the brilliance of the realm of the eternal Forms. Thus the so-called “knowledge” of the sensible world will lack the clarity and certainty of the knowledge of the Forms. But while there is a line fixed between the two domains and two kinds of knowledge, within each area there remains some gradation. The

⁵⁸ Plato, *Republic*, VI.508d. The word translated “apprehends” is ἐνόησεν (*enoēsen*, fr. νοέω (*noeō*)); “knows” translates ἔγνω (*egnō*, fr. γιγνώσκω, (*gignōsko*)); “understanding” translates νοῦν (*noūn*, fr. νοῦς (*nous*) in both places. The word “believes” translates δοξάζει (*doxazei*, fr. *doxazō*).

result is that four degrees of separation can be discerned based on clarity. So Socrates asks, “Would you be willing to affirm that, with respect to what is truth and what is not, the division proportionally expresses the difference like this: as a believed object is to a known one, so is the likeness of a thing to the thing itself?”⁵⁹ Or to put it differently, belief offers at best an approximation of what a thing really is while knowledge captures its essence and sees it as it really *is*.

Socrates sums up the discussion of the divided line as follows:

So there are four portions of our line corresponding to four conditions in the *psyche*. The mind’s understanding is the highest; thought occupies the second step; the third is given to belief; and the last is mere imaging. Arrange these in ascending order and proportion according to their degree of clarity corresponding to the degree their respective objects are real and fit truth.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Plato, *Republic*, VI.509c–510a. Socrates’ question is at 510a. The phrase translated “believed object” is *δοξαστόν* (*doxaston*, fr. *δοξαστός* (*doxatos*), an adjective derived from *doxa*); the phrase rendered as “known one” is *γνωστόν* (*gnōston*, fr. *γνωστός* (*gnōstos*), an adjective). The translation intends to capture the sense of these terms as adjectives.

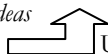
⁶⁰ Plato, *Republic*, VI.511d–e. “Belief” here is a form of the Greek *pistis*. The phrase “mind’s understanding” translates *νόησιν* (*noēsin*, fr. *νόησις* (*noesis*)). “Thought” translates *διάνοιαν* (*dianoian*, fr. *διάνοιας* (*dianoias*), which can carry the meaning of having a notion (i.e., like an opinion or belief), and thus sits naturally between “understanding” and “belief.” It is translated by some as “understanding,” as in the discerning of an intention or purpose or meaning of something. But “thought”—a more general term—seems to better fit the sense here, especially since it follows *noesis*, a better term to express the kind of understanding that is often conceived of as “knowledge.” Finally, “imaging” translates *εἰκασίαν* (*eikasian*, fr. *εἰκασία* (*eikasia*)), a

We can illustrate all this as follows:

Objects

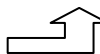
Cognitions

Intelligible realm *Eternal Forms/Ideas*



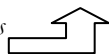
Understanding
(*noēsis*)

Images of visible objects



Thought (*dianoia*)

Sensible world *Visible objects*



Belief (*pistis*)

*Images (shadows, reflections)
of physical objects*



Imagination (*eikasia*)

It might be noted here that the “understanding” envisioned is the mind’s operation that achieves “knowledge” and discerns correctly “truth.” Below it is “thought,” a somewhat general term that shades between understanding at its upper end and having a notion similar to belief below it. It might be reckoned the most ambiguous of the four terms here. I think it may well capture the notion that some thinking uses abstractions of concrete objects; it has a notion about visible objects that leads toward a more general or abstract comprehension of them.

Also important to note is Plato’s employment of another word translated “belief”: *πίστις* (*pistis*), which has as its verb complement *πιστεύω* (*pisteuō*). *Pistis* is the kind of noun that can actually express an action like a verb does. The core sense is *trust* placed in something (whether a person or thing). The word also reflects *confidence* and *assurance*, often as the result of persuasion.

noun denoting the likeness or representation of something. Also see VII.533e–534a.

Much of our confidence is derived from intellectual persuasion, so the idea of *pistis* as being *persuasive arguments* that reassure and increase confidence is logical enough. The term can refer as well to giving *evidence* and at times it is even pressed to the sense of constituting *proof*.

The use of *pistis* in Plato's fixed line scheme is as a subdivision of *doxa*, with the latter encompassing both "imaging" (*eikasian*) and "belief" (*pistin*). *Pistis* may be seen as a particular kind of 'taking up of a position' (*doxa*)—as belief possessing more confidence than is possible when speculation of mere images is involved. That is because *pistis* deals with what can be seen.⁶¹

Is Plato Right?

Rather than be caught in irreconcilable 'either-or' dichotomies, Plato adopts a 'both-and' reconciliation by distinguishing what we think we "know" (i.e., believe) through sense-perception and what we can actually "know" through reason. Put another way, all those things which appear to our senses as good or just or beautiful are but imperfect copies or representations of an eternal Idea of the Good, Just, and Beauty. Thus to our senses there are many objects that appear to us as good, but there exists only one unified and constant Good—an eternal Idea that as the Form of Good generates the many imperfect objects our senses perceive.

In terms familiar to us from the long history of philosophical discussion, the Sensible world is an empirical one; the Intelligible world a rational one. We engage with the world of apparent objects through our

⁶¹ A different sense than that in the New Testament's Hebrews 11.

senses. We engage the world of eternal Ideas through reason. Just as the Intelligible realm is superior to the Sensible world, so reason is superior to sense-perception. In the *Republic* the philosopher is contrasted with others as one who uses reason to apprehend Forms and thereby has “knowledge,” while others depend merely on their senses and thereby achieve only “belief.”

Though Plato ‘rescues’ sense-perception, retaining it in his view of knowledge, he still agrees with Parmenides that it cannot yield *epistēmē*. His fixed line is an unyielding one. Accordingly, the step between sense-perception and reason, from belief to knowledge, is an immense one, like the change from caterpillar to butterfly rather than like from one shade of blue to another.

Many people find the distance thus fixed to be an exaggeration. To some, Plato’s talk of the eternal forms sounds much like a portrait of the hidden wizard of OZ until the Toto of reason pulls back the curtain. It all seems a little too much a matter of smoke and mirrors. Much like Socrates could sarcastically ask what makes Protagoras so special we should listen to him, one could ask the same of Plato. Is his reason superior to the person who trusts sense-perception more fully?

Plato’s solution only appeals to certain people. Though many desire an objective knowledge, not all of them are persuaded that Plato’s path leads to it well enough. Indeed, two contemporaries—his famous student Aristotle and Plato’s professional rival Isocrates—won many advocates with views that erase the rigidity of Plato’s scheme and favor different ways of seeing knowledge.

Chapter 3

Isocrates' 'Pragmatism'

Plato's artful construction of an objective knowledge struck some of his contemporaries as *too* artful—and thus removed from the actual facts on the ground. A number of alternatives were proposed, two of which will now draw our attention. Each has shown itself enduring and each has exercised influence in the past and the present.

Isocrates' Pragmatism

Plato's contemporary Isocrates (436–388 B.C.E.) is among those put off by Plato's fancy wrangling with ideas. He accuses Plato of being like the Sophists of the time who delight in clever speech without really helping anyone by it—and in one place puts Protagoras and Plato's school in the same basket!⁶²

⁶² Isocrates, *Helen*, 1–5, seems to find both Protagoras (by name) and Plato (by implication), among others, as kinds of Sophists. Of course, Plato also criticizes Isocrates; see Howland, "The Attack on Isocrates." Despite such disputations the two had some common ground. Isocrates, a little older than Plato, also started out as a disciple of Socrates. He developed his own school as a practicing rhetorician and seems to have been more popular than Plato in their own day. They seem to have been on cordial enough personal terms (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Plato*, III.3), though critical of certain things about one another. Plato's Socrates praises the young Isocrates in *Phaedrus*, 279a.

His criticism of the Sophists, Plato's school, and others, purports to side with 'ordinary' people. These folk, interested in knowledge, listen to the so-called 'learned' and come away shaking their heads in dismay.

When, accordingly, ordinary individuals add up everything, observing that those who 'teach wisdom' and 'provide bliss' themselves lack much and receive little from those they instruct, that they are on guard against contradictions in words while unseeing of the same in deeds, and, in addition, that they feign to know the future but concerning right now they are unable to say anything relevant or provide any counsel, but that, in great contrast, those who actively assert their beliefs (*doxais*) are more consistent and more successful than those who loudly announce their knowledge (*epistemen*), then I think these folk have good cause for judging as idle and frivolous these teachers' pursuits and as not being at all the proper care of the *psyche*.⁶³

"Philosophy"

Isocrates takes fundamental issue with those, like Plato, who have laid claim to a different vision of "philosophy" than he has. It must be noted right here, though, that Isocrates has widely been seen by professional philosophers as a lightweight. In fact, he is on the losing side in the historical struggle to claim what "philosophy" is. For Isocrates the term refers to the general study and education by which one cares for the

⁶³ Isocrates, *Against the Sophists*, 7–8. The word "belief" translates δόξαις (*doxais*, fr. *doxa*). I have rendered χρωμένους (*chrōmenous*, fr. *chrōō* (*chraō*)) as "actively asserts" to highlight its contrast with ἐπαγγελλομένους (*epangellomenous*, fr. ἐπαγγέλλω (*epangellō*)), "loudly announces." The former is authoritative in action while the latter is just a public show. Also see *Helen*, 4–5.

psyche and inculcates culture; a “philosopher” is a teacher, particularly of the art of persuasive speaking for the public good. He offers, after a lifetime of reflection on the matter, his view of the matter:

Now my view is simple enough to understand. Given that it is not in human nature to have knowledge such that we can *know* what is to be done or said, it follows that the one who is wise is the person who by *belief* in actual practice aims for and typically hits the best target in most matters. So philosophers are those persons who most diligently apply themselves to those studies by which they will most quickly acquire such wisdom.⁶⁴

Isocrates’ view really *is* simple enough. An illustration captures its essence:



In the absence of knowledge,
belief is aiming for—and
usually hitting—a target.

⁶⁴ Isocrates, *Antidosis*, 271. The word translated “knowledge” is our familiar term ἐπιστήμην (*epistēmēn*, fr. *epistēmē*); “know” translates εἰδεῖμεν (*eideimen*, fr. οἶδα (*oída*)); “belief” renders δόξαις (*doxais*, fr. *doxa*). Cf. *Antidosis*, 272 for Isocrates’ awareness of the novelty of his own understanding of ‘philosophy’ and ‘philosopher.’ The “wisdom” is practical in nature (*phronēsis*).

Since, in practice, knowledge on so many things is elusive, it is enough to have well-constructed beliefs—i.e., beliefs that suffice most of the time to reach what one is aiming at. This is not meant as a depreciation of “knowledge” as such. Rather, it is a favoring of a certain conception of knowledge. That Isocrates loved learning and knowledge is clear. He is reputed to have had placed over his school the inscription, “If you desire knowledge, you shall acquire much learning.”⁶⁵

But his choice of terms is instructive. Isocrates prizes the knowledge that comes from *learning*, and the learning he has in mind is what he extols as philosophy. He is not much interested in the knowledge (*epistēmē*) Plato prizes because such knowledge with its claims to certainty are ordinarily beyond the reach of people and thus forever limited in its actual usefulness for living.

So this matter of what “philosophy” is proves to be more than merely an interesting sidebar to our discussion; it directly gets at Isocrates’ views about knowledge. Professional philosophers molded in the traditions of philosophy following after Plato often see Isocrates as simple and unsophisticated, though erudite in wording. But Isocrates sees himself rather as someone avoiding empty debates over abstruse and unprovable notions while championing a common sense view.

⁶⁵ Isocrates, *To Demonicus*, 18: ἐὰν ᾗς φιλομαθῆς, ἔσει πολυμαθῆς. (*ean ēs philomathēs, esei polumathēs*.) The Greek *philomathēs* (φιλομαθῆς) presents a “love of learning,” thus a “desire” for it; the word *polumathēs* (πολυμαθῆς) conveys the sense of “much learning.” As can be seen by comparing the words, *-mathēs* (-μαθῆς), from *mathēsis* (μάθησις), “the achievement of knowledge (through learning),” is core to both. Norlin, *Isocrates*, I, 15, translates this as “If you love knowledge, you will be a master of knowledge.”

Knowledge vs. Belief

Like Parmenides, Protagoras, Plato and others, Isocrates considers both knowledge (*epistēmē*) and belief (*doxa*). Like Protagoras he champions belief, but like Plato he finds it different from knowledge. To put it a bit differently, unlike Protagoras he is unwilling to call belief knowledge, and unlike Plato he won't denigrate belief in the interest of extolling knowledge.

Isocrates should not be misunderstood. He by no means depreciates knowledge. He just thinks that a wise person understands when knowledge is at hand, and when it is not, and acts accordingly. He writes:

Those who are intelligent, with respect to those things they *know*, do not need counsel (for it would be overly careful), but instead act as those who do know; but where they do take counsel, they ought not to hold that they already know what the result will be, but actively assert their *belief* though they admittedly are unknowing what might come about.⁶⁶

He tries to take a sober view of how people really are. In that light he remarks:

It seems to me that while everyone sets their heart on their own advantage and wants to have more than others, they do not *know* the manner of practice that brings such results, but they take up different *beliefs*—

⁶⁶ Isocrates, *On the Peace*, 8. The first “know” translates ἴσασι (*isasi*, fr. οἶδα (*oída*)); the second renders ἐγνώκασι (*egnōkasi*); the third translates εἰδέναι (*eidenai*, fr. οἶδα). “Belief” renders δόξῃ (*doxē*, fr. *doxa*). The word “unknowing” translates the verb ἀγνοοῦντας (*agnoountas*, fr. ἀγνοέω (*agnoeō*), an addition made to the Greek text later), related to our English noun “agnostic.” For the interested reader wanting a quick comparison, translator Terry Papillon, *Isocrates II*, 137 n. 6, succinctly contrasts Isocrates’ sense of *doxa* with Plato’s.

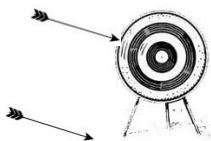
with some having suitable beliefs capable of hitting the mark, and others completely missing their target.⁶⁷

Thus, there are wise and foolish people. The wise distinguish when knowledge is available, and act on it. When it isn't available they do not rely just on their own thinking but seek counsel. Then, not presuming to know they are right, they form the best belief they can and act. The foolish form ill-suited beliefs they may confuse with knowledge and, not surprisingly, end up often missing what they are aiming at.

This does not mean wise people are always right, or fools always wrong. He comments, "Those who are 'wise' occasionally miss the practical course to take, whereas occasionally some nobody who is generally looked down upon hits the target as to how to proceed and is judged to have given the best counsel."⁶⁸ Yet comprehending the difference between how the wise and the foolish go about life is instructive. We can alter our first picture by now fleshing it out thusly:



Intelligent people, using appropriate counsel, form beliefs that usually hit their mark (though they cannot *know* that it will).



Foolish folk with ill-suited beliefs completely miss their target. Their beliefs do not lead to goal-satisfying actions.

⁶⁷ Isocrates, *On the Peace*, 28. The word rendered "know" is εἰδέναι (*eidenai*, fr. *oida*); the word translated "beliefs" is δόξαις (*doxais*, fr. *doxa*).

⁶⁸ Isocrates, *Panathenaicus*, 248.

But how can anyone know when knowledge is at hand, or when instead belief must suffice? The answer lies in the crux of Isocrates' view of knowledge.

Knowledge in Living Life

Life, thinks Isocrates, is not well-served by navel-staring while contemplating esoteric truths about eternal Ideas. It is about entering into the practical moment-by-moment, day-by-day fray of working and living alongside others who like oneself struggle to do their best to get by and help the world be a little bit better. Most problems—and the all the important ones—are characterized by complexity and uncertainty.

Isocrates can readily see *epistēmē* as the acquisition of enough information to provide a thorough understanding of something. He simply asks, 'How often does that actually happen?' Think about it. Can anyone ever have enough information to be *certain* that so-and-so is the right person to marry, or that such-and-such is the right career to pursue?

Recognizing this, Isocrates thinks the most appropriate course is one that proves practical for everyday living. He finds his inspiration in the realm of the so-called *stochastic* arts. These include things like navigating a ship, practicing medicine—or the art archery. In life, as in archery, the target is hard to hit as distance, wind, and other factors all must be judged. The archer takes aim as best he or she can and lets fly the arrow. A 'good enough' outcome is hitting the target, even if not a bullseye. There is *some* information, but no *certainly*. Belief, not knowledge, is relied upon in complex life situations.

Isocrates likens life to crafting a speech: one figures out what they desire to say and then plans the best way to say it. So of life he advises:

Nothing can be intelligently achieved unless with foresight you first fully think through and deliberate how to spend the time you have left, and the kind of life you propose to lead After you have marked off the general shape of your life, then you should reflect upon each day-by-day part with its actions to see how they will contribute to your original plan. And if in this way you search and philosophize, then you will take aim by your *psyche* at the target advantageous to you and you will be more likely to hit your mark. But if you lack such a plan, instead wandering haphazardly in your actions, then you will surely miss your mark in many things.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Isocrates, *To the Children of Jason*, 8–10.

Chapter 4

Aristotle's Spectrum

The simple, straightforward and practical position set out by Isocrates is appealing to many. Yet though the logic of it is easy to grasp, to many it seems quite underdeveloped and not really much help in understanding what “knowledge” really is. Isocrates seems to largely set aside knowledge-as-*epistēmē* as impractical and thus worth less attention than the more practical matter of belief, of which useful ones flow from the pursuit of a particular kind of learning (the knowledge he praises).

But Plato's student Aristotle, responding to both Isocrates and Plato, argues nothing is more practical than knowledge—and he has *epistēmē* in mind, at least as an ideal target to guide all learning. He offers thereby an implicit epistemological rejoinder to Isocrates that is easy to miss in light of his very visible disagreements with Isocrates on rhetoric.⁷⁰

Rather than being *reconstructed* from recollection of knowledge before birth, as Plato's Socrates proposed, knowledge is actively *constructed* from the facts on the ground. As Aristotle works through the matter he develops a thorough and comparatively detailed concep-

⁷⁰ On the relation of Aristotle to Isocrates there is a considerable body of material dating all the way back to the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus. For a brief introduction with respect to the differences on rhetoric, see Benoit, “Isocrates and Aristotle on Rhetoric.”

tion of what knowledge is. It is one largely responsible for shaping the development of science.

A reasonable argument can be made that Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) is the most influential philosopher in Western history. He is commonly paired with Plato as representing one pole opposite his teacher in a continuum that pits philosophical idealism against empiricism. Such a depiction does an injustice to both figures, but it does at least highlight that Aristotle set his own course and departed from his famous teacher.⁷¹ He also critiques his many philosophical predecessors—including Heraclitus, Parmenides, Protagoras, Democritus, and even Isocrates—in developing his own metaphysics.⁷²

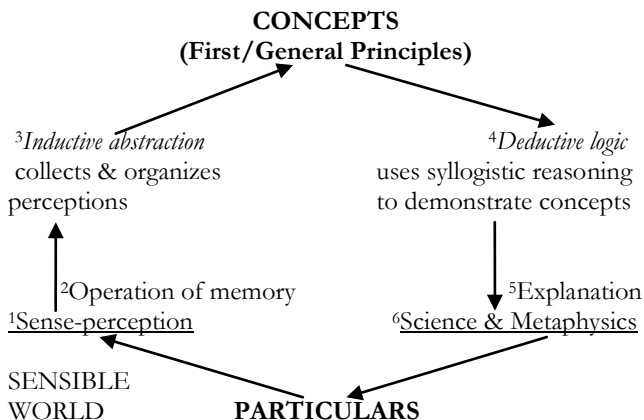
Aristotle's Grand Picture

Where Plato appeals to reason as providing an *a priori* (i.e., before experience) set of eternal Ideas or Forms that provide a context within which to understand sense particulars, Aristotle opts for a different explanation. Making use of memory to hold on to sense perceptions, the human mind can apply reason *a posteriori* (i.e., after experience). Abstract thinking using a process called *induction* logically gathers, classifies, and systematizes sense perceptions.

⁷¹ Aristotle's opposition to certain ideas of Plato, especially his theory of forms, seems to have been the focus of Book II of the now lost *On Philosophy*. See Chroust, "A Tentative Outline."

⁷² With respect to Heraclitus, Parmenides and Protagoras, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 984a, 1005b, 1010a, 1012a–b, 1062a–b, 1063b. (Heraclitus); 984b, 986b, 1001a, 1009b, 1089a (Parmenides); 985b, 1009a–b, 1039a, 1042b, 1069b (Democritus); 998a, 1007b, 1053a–b, 1062b (Protagoras). For Aristotle on Isocrates, see Chroust, "Aristotle's Earliest Course."

This process is shown in the 1-2-3 steps at the left of the illustration below.



The right side of the illustration shows that arriving at concepts, or general principles derived from the mind's logical operations on sense-perceptions, is not the end goal. It is a critical way station on the road to knowledge (*epistēmē*). The ultimate goal for Aristotle is knowledge of reality, which means both metaphysics and science. Where the mind uses inductive logic to derive concepts from sense-perception, it employs a different kind of logic, called *deduction*, to demonstrate concepts. In other words, deduction does not establish general principles but shows how they explain the particular things that give rise to sense-perceptions. Thus the illustration displays a process that begins and ends with the particulars of reality. Steps 4-5-6 indicate how concepts are used to explain particulars in the manner of science, which uses both sense-experience (empiricism) and reason.

Let us for a moment return to Aristotle's declaration: "All people by nature stretch themselves toward knowledge." The Greek *looks* like this:

πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει.

And it *sounds* like this in English:

Pantes anthrōpoi tou eidenai oreontai phusei.

The key word here is εἰδέναι (*eidenai*). Consider what Classics scholar Rosemary Wright says about the word used by Aristotle:

The word Aristotle uses here for knowing is *eidenai*, which has a root connection with the verb for 'seeing': a knowing *that*, grasped by the rational mind. This contrasts with *epistēmē*, a knowing *how*, connected with scientific understanding, and also *gnōmē* or *gnōsis*, recognition from acquaintance, *noēsis*, intellectual activity, and *phronēsis*, practical wisdom. These terms often overlap, and, in their multiplicity, we find that the Greeks continually raised questions about knowledge and the different kinds of knowing.⁷³

Wright's remarks on these different words should not be treated like a dictionary entry. The exact meaning of words is dependent on context and while we can describe any given word in some general sense—as in saying that it carries a basic idea we might capture in a few words—the truth is that words, like people, are complex things. When Wright, for instance, speaks of *epistēmē* as 'a knowing *how*,' it must be remembered she immediately adds, 'connected with scientific understanding.' I would place the emphasis more on the lat-

⁷³ Wright, *Introducing Greek Philosophy*, 132.

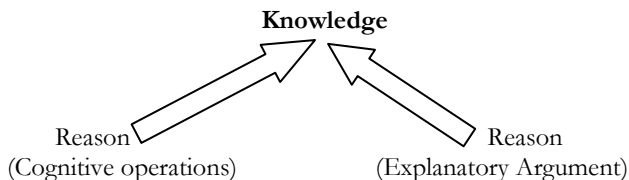
ter part than the former, for in a figure like Aristotle *epistēmē* is a body of knowledge derived from an epistemological process. It isn't as much in contrast with *eidenai* as one might imagine, because the stretching Aristotle has in mind wants most of all to achieve *epistēmē* even if we for the most part must settle with an *eidenai* that keeps stretching. In other words, to use her English phrasing, our knowing *that* ultimately aims at achieving the deeper understanding of knowing *how*. I know *that* my car dependably gets me to the store, but how much better off I am when I also know *how* it does so, because if it breaks down I'm in a position to make a more effective response. This distinction helps remind us why knowledge matters.

Let's stay with this metaphor of an automobile. If we were to liken a concept such as "knowledge" to a vehicle within which words are acting like car parts, each of these different parts having its own history and character contributing to the overall nature of the car and its functioning, then Aristotle emerges as one of the great engineers and mechanics. He names and describes what various kinds of knowledge are, how they operate, and how they relate to one another.

Over a series of books, often frustratingly incomplete, dense, inconsistent, or otherwise challenging, Aristotle develops a sense of knowledge that can best be described as seeing it as a spectrum—knowledges. While others before him at least implicitly recognize knowledge can be conceived along a continuum, or that there are various kinds of knowledge, it is Aristotle who sketches out and clarifies the differences.

Like Heraclitus and Protagoras—and despite his many disagreements with both—Aristotle finds sense-perception reliable enough to contribute importantly to our knowledge of reality. Like Parmenides and Plato—both of whom he also dissents from on many points—he values reason even more highly than perception.

Aristotle has confidence that human beings are capable of knowledge because they are capable of reason; it is a part of being human by nature.⁷⁴ Reason is both a cognitive operation—a thinking process—and/or its products. With respect to Aristotle and the right side of our first illustration for him, when we use “reason” (a cognitive operation) we produce an “account,” “answer,” “computation,” or “reckoning” (all cognitive products) so that we provide an “explanation,” make a “case,” or offer an “argument.” In short, knowledge attained by reason expresses itself in *propositions*. Or to put it somewhat differently, knowledge is a product of reason as a process and as a product of reason is expressed through reason in the explanatory form of an argument. Reason stands before and after knowledge. Picture it this way:



⁷⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b–1098a [I.710–15]. He adopts the view that the *psyche* has both a rational and irrational part: οὗτον τὸ μὲν ἄλογον αὐτῆς εἶναι, τὸ δὲ λόγον ἔχον (*hoion to men alogon autēs einai, to de logon echon*)—see 1102a (end) [I.13.9–10].

The rational part of the human *psyche* divides into two abilities, one capable of knowledge in the purest sense (*epistēmonikos*), and one capable of skilled reasoning that yields knowledge in a practical manner (*logistikos*).⁷⁵ The former leads to *epistēmē*, often referred to as ‘theoretical knowledge’; the latter leads to a practical reason yielding practical knowledge. These are sometimes distinguished from each other by the labels *contemplative* (pure reason engaging the First Principles, or concepts) and *calculative* (practical reason engaging particular things that vary from one another).⁷⁶ Perhaps the most useful way to distinguish them is Aristotle’s remark that sometimes we mean knowledge as something we *have* and sometimes as something we *use*.⁷⁷

The highest form of knowledge (*epistēmē*) is the possession of a body of sufficient and certain information about reality that aims at what is eternal (metaphysics) and what is entailed in the natural sciences. The use of practical reason is wide enough to embrace arts and skills (*technē*), as well as prudent ethical practice (*phronēsis*). What unites these latter two is their action-orientation, and the simple fact that they are not aimed at theoretical knowledge. These two—*technē* and *phronēsis*—can also be described as enough separate so

⁷⁵ Aristotle’s epistemology is not nearly so simple as the presentation here makes it appear. For a more thorough consideration see Takatsura, *Aristotle’s Theory of Practical Cognition*. See especially pp. 208–211 with respect to the terms discussed here.

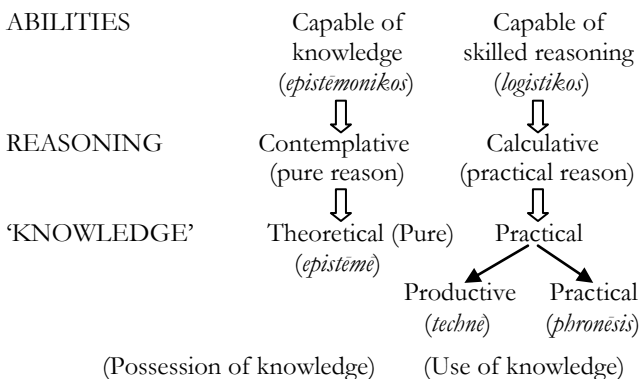
⁷⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139a [VI.1.5–6]. Key terms: ἐπιστημονικόν (*epistēmonikon*, fr. ἐπιστημονικός (*epistēmonikos*); λογιστικόν (*logistikon*, fr. λογιστικός (*logistikos*)).

⁷⁷ Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1225b [II.9.4]. It is worth noting that in this place Aristotle correlates “knowledge” (οἶδα, *oída*) with “understanding” (ἐφίσταμαι, *ephistamai*).

that three kinds of knowledge result: theoretical, productive, and practical.⁷⁸ The essential distinction between theoretical knowledge and the other two is well-captured in Aristotle’s comment in his *Metaphysics*:

It is correct to call philosophy knowledge (*epistēmē*) of the truth (*alētheias*). The purposed end of theoretical knowledge is truth; the intended end of practical knowledge is action. Even if they consider how things *are*, practical folk still do not contemplate what is eternal, but only what is now and in relation to other things.⁷⁹

We can illustrate all of this as follows:



The key to all this is simple enough: what Aristotle does is resist the idea that *everything* we call in ordinary talk “knowledge” has to be *certain*. Some knowledge can

⁷⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139b [VI.2.5]. Key terms: τέχνη (*technē*); φρόνησις (*phronēsis*). On *phronēsis* also see the comment of Philodemus, *On Rhetoric* (*Rhetorica*), II, §2b, about Epicurus’ remarks on it.

⁷⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 993b [II.1]. The word θεωρητικῆς (*theōrētikēs*) refers to “speculative,” hence “theoretical” reflections. The phrases “purposed end” and “intended end” both translate τέλος (*telos*).

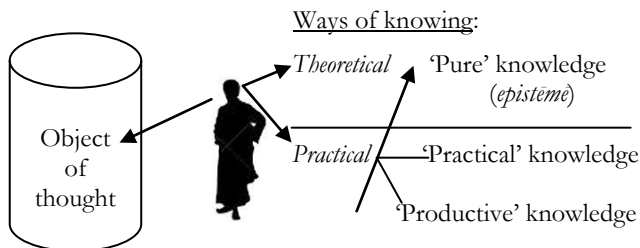
be, but much has no need to be; the latter needs only be sufficient for the matter at hand.

On one side, *epistēmē* is characterized by such certainty, which is why it is knowledge in the purest sense—i.e., exactly what we might expect in our English sense of possessing information sufficient, certain, and true. It is the knowledge of reality as it is and such knowledge is the ultimate prize. It is Knowledge with a capital K.

On the other side, he recognizes another sort of knowledge—*not* “belief,” at least not as his predecessors imagined. This non-*epistēmē* knowledge is practical in that it usefully reflects actual experience of a thing, even though it lacks certainty that it reflects the way that thing really *is*. It contents itself that in terms of any question of certainty can only be *probable* at best, yet that doesn’t matter if the result is good enough to meet the need of the moment, as the knowledge of arts and skills provides.

Formally, in terms of the way philosophy had been developing to discuss such things, this practical knowledge might be called “belief,” inasmuch as certainty is lacking. But Aristotle’s practical knowledge explains a thing adequately based on actual experience, with the desire and expectation that its explanation most likely reflects *epistēmē* rather than some false belief (*doxa*). Accordingly, the rational mind always strives for a dependable, certain body of knowledge (*epistēmē*), but it is also rational to do the best we can to reach toward certainty in the uncertain practice of knowledge found in *technē* and *phronēsis*.

We can simplify the preceding illustration to show the ascendant nature of Aristotle’s conception:

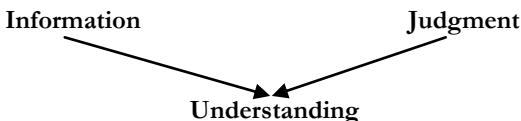


So who needs belief?

At this point it may very much look like Aristotle has found a way to set aside belief, or at the very least reframe it more positively than Socrates and Plato so that belief serves knowledge. The latter is the better way to see what Aristotle does, for belief actually has a very important role to play in the way Aristotle finds human beings think and stretch toward knowledge. In his own distinctive way Aristotle has discovered how belief can contribute to knowledge—even be knowledge, if never quite Knowledge (*epistēmē*).

The Role of Belief

Belief's role in the spectrum of knowledge is best seen in relation to the right side of our first illustration for Aristotle. On the left side, the *source* of knowledge—information—is prioritized. It is received, remembered, collected and organized. Reason detects principles and there is a shift to the right side. The concepts are set out and explained prioritizing the *method* of knowledge—judgment. The *object* of knowledge remains the same as it ever was: the understanding of reality. So to our first illustration we could add a basic element of knowledge on each side, both contributing to one goal:



What Aristotle wants to emphasize is that the object of knowledge (understanding things as they really *are*) is served whether certainty exists or not. Theoretical and practical knowledge serve the same end, though only the former achieves that end and is *epistēmē*. What differentiates various kinds of knowledge is partly the amount and/or quality of information one has, and partly the nature of the judgment. With respect to *epistēmē*, judgment is measured by the criterion of truth (though Aristotle does not address the issue of a criterion of truth *per se*).⁸⁰ On the other hand, with practical knowledge judgment is more a matter of trust, persuasion, and confidence. In both cases, though, judgment is the taking up of a position—and that means belief may have a role.

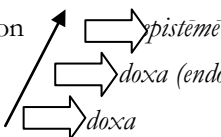
Belief & Argumentation

That role is best seen on the right side of the first illustration, where deductive reasoning forms explanations, which present as *arguments*. Aristotle enumerates three kinds of arguments.⁸¹ Each matches up with an

⁸⁰ Crivelli, *Aristotle on Truth*, 9.

⁸¹ Aristotle, *Topics*, 105b [I.14]. He divides problems and propositions into three general classes: ethical, logical and physical (i.e., having to do with Nature). He admits these are not easy to define, but he uses induction to draw up a description of them. He also notes an important distinction: physical problems, when the interest is ‘philosophy,’ produce demonstrative arguments aimed at *knowledge* (*epistēmē*) and truth; otherwise, physical problems produce dialectical arguments where the interest is *belief*. Problems of belief (especially

element along the spectrum of knowledge—and in a manner perhaps reminiscent of Plato’s ascending steps:

1. Demonstration 
2. Dialectical
3. Contentious

In fact, in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle employs the three states Plato had named—ignorance, belief, and knowledge—calling attention to the absolute nature of knowledge (as *epistēmē*), that it cannot sometimes be knowledge and sometimes ignorance; it is an all-or-nothing proposition. To this he contrasts *doxa*, which he says can vary: “But it is belief (*doxa*) that takes upon itself that which is otherwise than what it is.”⁸² Some of what people call “knowledge” is contingent—it *might* be true. While it lacks the certainty of *epistēmē*, “knowing” associated with *doxa* can coincide with what is true, but it is formally “belief” because it ‘might be otherwise.’

Argument Type 1: Demonstration

Among arguments the first in rank is scientific argument, known as a *demonstration* (*ἀπόδειξις*, *apodeixis*). Using deductive logic it demonstrates a previously unknown truth—the logical conclusion of the line of argumentation built upon sound premises. The aim is causality, in the broad sense of providing a rationale (*logos*) for why a particular thing belongs to the classifi-

in the realm of religion) belong to ethical and logical problems and propositions.

⁸² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1039b (end) [VII.15]. Especially see Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 89a [I.33].

cation in which we have put it.⁸³ In other words, demonstration yields an explanation that justifies placing a particular thing in relation to a concept (e.g., calling Fido a dog). Such explanation is thereby knowledge (*epistēmē*) and requires no effort at persuasion.

Argument Type 2: Dialectical

A second kind of argument, made famous by Socrates and Plato, is *dialectical*, a form Aristotle adapts. It starts from questions rather than answers (propositional statements). By investigating likenesses and differences, and carefully forming definitions, one gets to some logical conclusion. Dialectical arguments can be either inductive or deductive. Rather than *epistēmē*, *doxa* is at hand.

Earlier I mentioned belief (*doxa*) as different from Knowledge (*epistēmē*) in that the latter depends on a criterion of truth while the former instead relies on a criterion of trust through persuasion and confidence. Aristotle puts it this way: “When the purpose is philosophy one must treat things according to their truth; but with dialectics it is according to belief (*doxan*).”⁸⁴

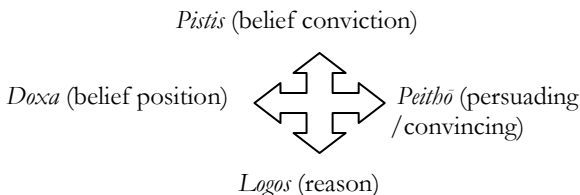
For Aristotle, the *doxa* belonging to dialectical arguments is linked with both *logos* and with *pistis*. In a well-known passage in his *De Anima* (*On the Soul*) Aristotle coordinates them as follows: “Every belief position (*doxē*) implicates a belief conviction (*pistis*), belief

⁸³ Traditionally, four causes are named: *material* (i.e., the actual physical properties that make up a thing and also make it different from other things); *formal* (i.e., the ‘form’ discerned in the particular substance; its observable structure or pattern); *efficient* (i.e., the agent behind the thing’s existence); and *teleological* or *final* (i.e., the *telos*—ultimate purpose or end—toward which a thing moves).

⁸⁴ Aristotle, *Topics*, 105b [I.14].

conviction likewise with persuasion, and persuasion with reason (*logos*).”⁸⁵ Human beings, in the positions they take up (belief as *doxa*), demonstrate a process of conviction (belief as *pistis*) following persuasion (*peithō*, a concept closely linked to belief), and that implicates reason (*logos*) at work. Persuasion is what produces, builds, and sustains the confidence of belief.

It is easy to sketch:



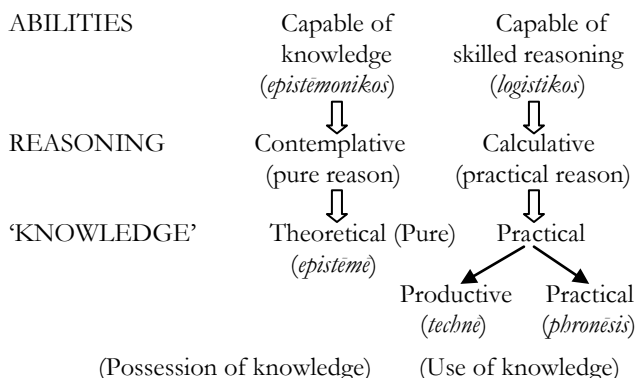
Argument Type 3: Contentious

Finally, there is the *contentious* argument. It needs to be persuasive because it starts from what *seems* at first to be generally accepted, but upon examination shows that it isn't. Because the matter isn't certain it can be debated; because it can be debated persuasion is in play as each party contends to establish its own position as the most plausible.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 428a [III.3] Greek: ἔτι πάσῃ μὲν δόξῃ ἀκολουθεῖ πίστις, πίσκει δὲ τὸ πεπεισθαι, πειθοὶ δὲ λόγος· (*eti pasē men doxē akolouthēi pistis, pistei de to pepeisthai peithoi de logos*.) Rather than render both the forms of *doxa* and *pistis* as ‘belief,’ I have used phrases: “belief position” for δόξῃ (*doxē*), and “belief conviction: for πίστις (*pistis*). Obviously, there are other ways to render the text. Many use “opinion” for *doxē*, and a choice like “conviction” (used alone) for *pistis* in order to tease out the same senses I aim at with my phrases. Persuasion (*peithō*) is etymologically related to *pistis*.

⁸⁶ Aristotle, *Topics* (*Topica*), 100b–101a [I.1]. The terms: demonstration (ἀπόδειξις, *apodeixis*); dialectical (διαλεκτικοί, *dialektikoi*) and con-

The kinds of argument may be added to an earlier illustration:



ARGUMENTS

| | | |
|-------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| (Rational) | Demonstrative | Dialectical |
| | | Contentious (some) |
| (Pseudo-rational) | | Contentious (some) |

Endoxa

Belief belongs to dialectical and contentious arguments, but the former is the one we want to concentrate upon. For the latter we probably should infer that *doxa* is not as compelling because it lacks the same degree of *pistis*, and especially because it proves not to have *endoxa*.

Now of *doxa*, *pistis*, and *endoxa*, the first two have been covered enough they should be reasonably clear.

tentious (*επιστηκός*, *epistiko*). On different scholarly views of Aristotle's dialectical argument, see Sim, "Dialectic and Definition in Aristotle's Topics."

It is the third, *endoxa* (ἔνδοξα) that is distinctive to Aristotle and most important to his thinking about how belief fits in epistemologically. The relation to *doxa* is obvious just in the form, but *endoxa* is a clearly separable term and not merely a modified *doxa*.⁸⁷ The familiar *doxa* is a wide, even generic term; *endoxa* offers a more precise and limited range that Aristotle can easily make a technical term, one fixed and regular in sensibility.

While translated in different ways into English, the basic sense of it as intended by Aristotle is made plain by his own words: “the strongly endorsed beliefs held by all, or by most people, or by the wisest (i.e., philosophers), or simply put, those beliefs endorsed by all, or by most, or by the most notable of people.”⁸⁸ Thus, *endoxa* refers to the beliefs held not by individuals *against* the crowd, but those endorsed *by* the crowd, or at least by a sizeable number, or at the very least by those we would term ‘most in the know.’ These are highly reputable beliefs *prima facie*.

There is a presumed credibility in *endoxa*, but Aristotle is sensible enough to know it might be falsely imputed. That is why he also mentions *adoxia* (e.g., the strongly endorsed belief of children or fools), and *paradoxia* (the minority viewpoint that might be right). The sense of “reputable,” then, must be understood in the manner of “strongly endorsed”—as in, generally well-advised—rather than as inherently credible.

⁸⁷ Classics scholar and expert on ancient Greek philosophy Han Balthussen, *Theophrastus against the Presocratics and Plato*, 39 n. 6, succinctly remarks, “The term *endoxa*, although clearly cognate with *doxa*, is also distinct from it.”

⁸⁸ Aristotle, *Topics*, 100a [I.1]. Cf. 105a [I.14].

Think back again to our initial illustration of Aristotle's epistemology. The item numbered 1 in it is sense-perception. We might think of this as "reality as it appears to be." It is the reality of everyday experience. But everyday experience presents us with puzzles to mentally sort out, which we do with the help of others. Whether natural phenomena, or socially constructed ones, our perceptions are substantially shaped by shared beliefs. As Aristotle puts it in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, when discussing certain virtues:

It is needful to do as we have done with other things, to set out things-as-they-appear-to-be (*phainomona*) and first deal with the questions they raise and in so doing bring to light as much as possible all the strongly endorsed beliefs (*endoxa*) about these matters of experience—and if not all such beliefs, then the greater number of them, or the most important ones. For if we are able to resolve the questions such that strongly endorsed beliefs (*endoxa*) endure, it is enough.⁸⁹

As we might expect, the process by which this occurs is dialectical argument.⁹⁰

Endoxa & Dialectical Arguments

Aristotle's sense of dialectic is not exactly like Plato's. Socrates employs dialectical reasoning to get at reality, and Plato thinks it can lead to the eternal Forms. Aristotle, on the other hand, employs dialectical arguments with a suspension of what is certain. Rather than beginning with what is *known* to be real, such arguments

⁸⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1145b [VII.1.5]. The relation of *endoxa* to *phainomona* has been a matter of some debate, which we cannot enter into here.

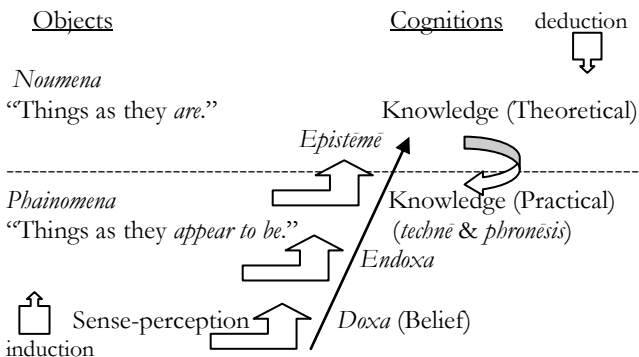
⁹⁰ Aristotle, *Topics*, 104a [I.10].

start with what people reasonably *suppose* is real—and that is what constitutes *endoxa*. Dialectical arguments must start with questions because answers that are certain and sufficient cannot be presumed.

Dialectical arguments are still logical in form. In dialectical arguments, where uncertainty prevails, the premises are not self-evident, but must be accepted. That is precisely where *endoxa* is invaluable. If one must discuss uncertain matters, why not start with what all people, or most of them, or the most learned believe?

Aristotle's Ladder

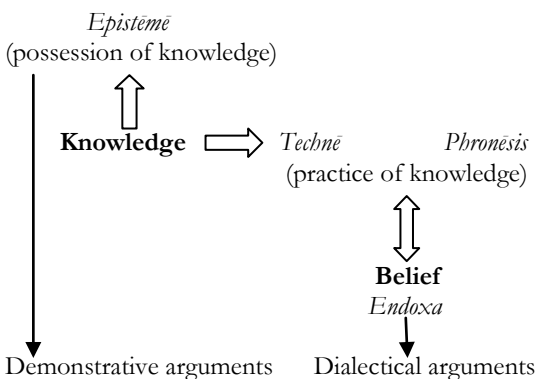
Aristotle offers a ladder that may remind us of Plato's fixed line, though without its rigid divisions.



Aristotle has more confidence than Plato does in what perception can yield and he extends that confidence to *endoxa*. Moreover, for Aristotle there is no appeal to an invisible, insensible world. There is just reality, and through reason we can apprehend it quite well enough. Induction is like an escalator going up, from particular perceptions to general concepts; deduc-

tion reasons like an escalator going down, proceeding from concepts to explain the nature of perceptions.

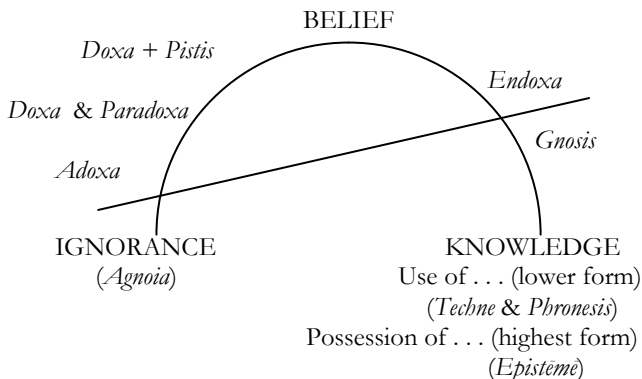
We can also put things together this way:



In this manner Aristotle solves the problem of the relation of belief to knowledge. Belief at its best is practical and true and stretches toward *epistēmē*. But Aristotle does not allow for *doxa* and knowledge to ever be the same—a rejection of the idea that knowledge is true, justified *belief*. But he does allow that belief (*doxa*) can be true, and in fact be highly credible (*endoxa*). One might even argue that belief leads right up to the door of knowledge and politely knocks. But only knowledge is inside.

A Continuum

Finally, we can venture a hypothetical representation of Aristotle's ideas in the form of a spectrum ranging across Plato's three basic epistemological states of ignorance, belief, and knowledge:



Aristotle is quite aware that some people argue that the same thing can be the object of both knowledge and *doxa*, and further contend that they “believe” everything they “know.” Aristotle maintains that they are mistaken, having confused how they attained a fact and the reason for it.⁹¹ He concludes that it is impossible to simultaneously hold both a belief and have knowledge, though he allows it is possible for one person to know something while another merely holds an opinion or belief about it.⁹²

Aristotle’s massive, subtle, and complex musings on knowledge brought to a close one era while opening the door to another one.

⁹¹ Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, 89a12–38 (I.33).

⁹² Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, 89a39–40–89b1–6 (I.33 (end)).

Chapter 5

Epicureans: Champions of Sense-Perception

One of Aristotle's pupils, known to history as Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.E.), changed the world through the military might of his followers. But in initiating the changes that placed Hellenistic culture throughout the lands Alexander conquered, he also inadvertently changed epistemology. For Greek thinkers the world had grown larger, more diverse, and less certain. The principal epistemological question shifted from 'What is knowledge?' to 'Is knowledge possible?'⁹³

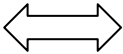
This should not be shocking if we recall what happened in light of the impasse and uncertainty created by the earlier debates over what is real. Just as competing positions like Heraclitus and Parmenides forced a deeper thinking about what knowledge is, the competing ideas of Protagoras, Plato, Isocrates, Aristotle and others forced a reappraisal of knowing that went beyond efforts to define it to wonder if it is even possible for people to achieve knowledge.

⁹³ Classics scholar and expert on Hellenistic philosophy Gisela Striker, *Essays*, 150, observes, "Towards the end of the fourth century B.C., Greek epistemology appears to undergo some dramatic changes. New technical terms introduced by Epicurus and the Stoic Zeno, indicate a shift of interest from the question 'What is knowledge?'—given that there is such a thing—to 'Is there any knowledge?'"

On one side, the increased exposure to cultural diversity and the constant pressure of competing world-views inevitably raised questions, opened new possibilities for thinking, and challenged limited perspectives and old assumptions. On the other side, even within the comfortable confines of Greek philosophy the most influential voices had confidently asserted dramatically different positions about what knowledge is. Even a quick and casual glance shows the situation as the 4th century B.C.E. was drawing to its end:

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| | Knowledge is . . . |
| Protagoras | Sense-perception, so that my belief (<i>doxa</i>) is true for me and knowledge. |
| Plato | Understanding the eternal Forms through reason (<i>epistēmē</i>). |
| Isocrates | Full information leading to certainty (knowledge = <i>epistēmē</i>), which hardly ever happens so belief (<i>doxa</i>) is preferable. |
| Aristotle | Ultimately <i>epistēmē</i> , but since that is elusive we often must settle for practical knowledge and for belief (<i>doxa</i>), of which the most reliable sort is <i>endoxa</i> . |

In light of these—and other—competing positions several responses developed along two poles:

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|-----------------|
| <u>Dogmatists</u> |  | <u>Skeptics</u> |
| Old School | | Academicians |
| (e.g., Peripatetics) | | (Middle & New) |
| New School | | Pyrrhonists |
| (e.g., Epicureans, Stoics) | | |

In essence, the Dogmatists either held on tightly to existing positions or doubled down on particular matters and espoused great certainty about knowledge in new

schools of thought, while the Skeptics either reformed existing positions in a new, more reserved fashion or tried to avoid even the semblance of having a position at all!

For our purposes, we shall pass by figures like Aristotle's successor, Theophrastus, who represents the Peripatetic clinging to an existing position that kept on being elaborated and refined but stayed recognizably the same. Instead, we will look at two new schools that emerged, each with great fervor and strongly committed to affirming the possibility of achieving knowledge. The label "dogmatist," applied to them chiefly by their opponents the Skeptics, nevertheless captures something essential about Epicureanism and Stoicism. Later we will turn to the Skeptic approaches, represented on one hand by followers in Plato's Academy who shifted that school's approach from the dogmatism of Plato, and on the other hand by those called Pyrrhonists, who followed the basic ideas of a teacher named Pyrrho.

But before we examine these different approaches we need to see them as all responding to the kind of situation sketched above. Each figure and group retains the conviction that knowledge matters because it is fundamentally about the truth of the way things really are. They all accept that knowledge has to be understood as a *human* affair, where human abilities of sense-perception and/or reason are things that must be judged as capable or insufficient to achieve knowledge.

It is in deciding *how* knowledge is achieved that positions forge their ideas about *what* knowledge is. But in wrestling with how knowledge is achieved, one must determine whether the means are *sufficient* and *clear* enough to warrant confidence.

Epicurean School

Epicurus of Athens (342–270 B.C.E.) developed a complete system of philosophy known to us principally through the material presented by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Epicurus' metaphysics relies on that developed by Leucippus (5th century B.C.E.) and Democritus (c. 460–c. 370 B.C.E.), with the latter the person Epicurus relies upon. The most notable exponents of Epicureanism later on were the Roman poet Lucretius (99–c. 55 B.C.E.) and the philosopher Philodemus of Gadara (c. 110–30 B.C.E.).

A Metaphysical Foundation: Democritus

Democritus was mentioned earlier and his metaphysics is a major alternative to Heraclitus and to Parmenides. Since it is decisive for Epicurus, we need to examine it briefly, along with Democritus' own views about knowledge.

Democritus is an advocate of the theory that reality is comprised of atoms (miniscule bits of indivisible matter) and the emptiness (the “void”) between them. Like Protagoras he recognizes individual differences in sense-perception that make it a subjective experience that creates epistemological uncertainty. Unlike Protagoras, who accepts each variant perception as a matter of belief, but true, Democritus assumes a more skeptical stance. Diogenes Laertius records Democritus' famous remark, “By agreed convention, a thing is ‘cold’ or a thing is ‘hot,’ but in truth there are only atoms and emptiness.”⁹⁴ In other words, our subjective experience

⁹⁴ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Pyrrho*, IX.72 [Pyrrho, 8]. Greek: “νόμῳ ψυχρόν, νόμῳ θερμόν, ἐτεῖ δὲ ἄτομα καὶ κενόν.” (nomō psuchron, nomō thermon, eteē de atoma kai kenon.)

of physical sensations is not the same as the actual reality. The Skeptic Sextus Empiricus sums Democritus up well enough, writing in part, “Democritus at times throws out the things that appear (*phainomena*) to sense perception (*aisthēsesi*) and instead says that nothing appears in accord with truth (*alētheian*), but only in accord with belief (*doxan*), since true things are those that actually exist—the atoms and the void.”⁹⁵

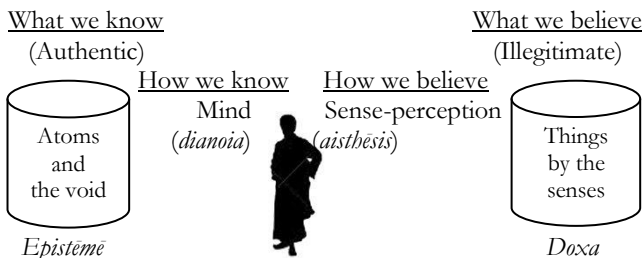
Although Democritus seems rather skeptical about the possibility of achieving knowledge, he is certainly dogmatic in his insistence about the reality of atoms and the void—a reality self-evident through reason as far as he is concerned. Sextus Empiricus explains it this way:

[I]n the *Canon* he says there are two kinds of knowing (*gnōseis*): on the one hand, through sense-perceptions (*aisthēseōn*), and on the other hand, through the mind (*dianoias*). Of these he calls knowing through the mind “authentic,” testifying that it is trustworthy (*piston*) in the judgment (*krisin*) of truth (*alētheias*). But to the other, knowing through sense-perception, he gives the name “illegitimate,” denying it reliability in the discernment of truth. He then says, “Of the two ways of knowing (*gnōmēs*) that exist, one is authentic and the other illegitimate. To the illegitimate belongs seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching; but the authentic is different from this.”⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Dogmatists: Against the Logicians* (*Pros logikous*), I.135–137. As we repeatedly see, words like *phainomena* (φαινόμενα) and *aisthēsis* (αἴσθησις) are important philosophical terms. The verb “appears” renders φαίνεσθαι (*phainesthai*, fr. φαίνω).

⁹⁶ Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Dogmatists: Against the Logicians*, I.138–139. As always, trying to decide how best to render a form of διάνοια (*dianoia*) is a challenge, since in English words like “mind,”

Democritus' position might be illustrated thusly:



Democritus contrasts the certainty of a basic reality known by the mind and existing by necessity with the uncertainty of “knowing” by the senses—which is really just “believing.”

Epicurus

Despite his adoption (and adaptation) of Democritus' metaphysics, Epicurus shows his independence of mind in drawing different epistemological conclusions. Methodologically, Epicurus and his followers espouse a disdain for dialectics.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, while calling for the use of ordinary terms in philosophic discourse, Epicurus in developing his *Canon* establishes his own ‘rules’—principles to guide Epicurean thinking.⁹⁸

The foundational criterion (*canon*) is the judgment of things as ‘true’ or ‘false’—i.e., real or not—by sense-perception. Sextus Empiricus describes Epicurus' position in these terms:

“intellect,” or “understanding”—all viable choices in translation—carry different connotations.

⁹⁷ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Epicurus*, X.31 [*Epicurus*, 20].

⁹⁸ Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus*, in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Epicurus*, X.36 [*Epicurus*, 24].

Now Epicurus says that all sense-perception (*aisthēsis*) is about things both true (*alēthē*) and real (*onta*). For there is unbroken continuity between a thing being ‘true’ and saying that ‘it exists’ (*huparchon*). And so in writing about truth and falsity, he says, “Truth is the same as having the being it is said to have.” And, “Falsity is the same as not having the being it is said to have.” He further says that sense-perception (*aisthēsin*), apprehending the things offered to it, neither taking away nor adding to nor changing anything (by virtue of being apart from reason (*alogon*)), is thus always being truthful and offers up things as they really are. But whereas all the things of sense-perception (*aisthetōn*) are true, the things of belief (*doxasta*) are different: some are true and some false, as has been shown earlier.⁹⁹

Epicurus argues that precisely because sense-perception’s immediacy is unmediated by reason, it avoids the manipulations of reason (the taking away, adding on, and changing that happens when reason is engaged), and thus can be trusted to present real objects as they really are. Or, to put it in a simple formula:

$$\begin{array}{lcl} \text{Sense-perception} & = & \text{truth and reality (things as they are)} \\ (aisthēsis) & & (alēthē) = (onta) \end{array}$$

The process is, broadly, empirical in nature, proceeding from inductive reasoning based on sense-perception. The human senses are the way reality as it *is* can be known. Or, as Diogenes Laertius writes, “Therefore, with respect to making pronouncements on unknown matters, they start by observation of sense phenomena.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Dogmatists: Against the Logicians*, II.9.

¹⁰⁰ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Epicurus*, X.32 [*Epicurus*, 20].

The reason Epicurus has such confidence in sense-perception is because he grounds it in Democritus' metaphysics so that the whole process is reliably physical (material). Perception is a physical process which begins when certain atoms associated with an external object create an "image," or "idol" of that object. These atoms, arising from the object, represent it faithfully. An object, made of atoms, has a 'skin' or 'frame' of atoms, hollow and incredibly thin, that preserves the exact likeness and shape of the object.¹⁰¹ Epicurus writes, "Now we must also consider that it is by the entering of something arising from objects outside ourselves that we see their shapes and think of them." There is an "impact" so that a *phantasia* ("appearance") arises, which is a representation of the image whether apprehended by the mind or the senses.¹⁰²

We can picture this process as follows:



The *phantasia* faithfully represents the object image.

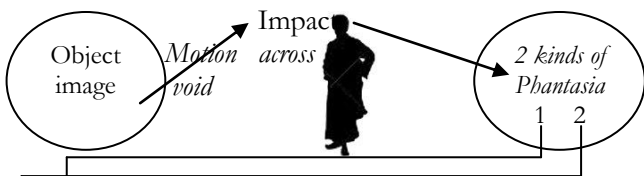
¹⁰¹ Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus*, in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Epicurus*, X.46 [Epicurus, 24]. Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things (De Rerum Natura)*, IV.37–41, writes, "an image (*imago*) has the appearance and contour resembling something like a kind of skin (*membranae*) at the surface of the body of a thing, which is torn away to flit about from here to there through the air."

¹⁰² Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus*, in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Epicurus*, X.46–50 [Epicurus, 24]. The quoted portion is from X.49. The key terms are: "image" (εἰκών, *eikōn*); "idol" (εἰδωλον, *eidolon*); "impact" (ἐπερισμός, *epereismos*); "mind" (διανοία, *dianoia*); and "senses" (αἰσθητηρίοις, *aisthetēriōis*).

Note that all Epicureans maintain is that in sense-perception there exists a faithful representation of the *image*, not of the object itself. This is an important distinction. While the image originates as a true representation of the object, it is just an image and so subject to manipulation. As noted a moment ago, it is human reason that accomplishes such manipulation.

That is why reason must be kept subordinate to sense-perception. To Epicurus and his followers this is a logically necessary conclusion: reason follows after and depends upon sense-perception.¹⁰³ Put more formally, as we saw in Epicurus' declaration earlier, sense-perception is *alogos*—apart from reason. It has no need to account for itself or offer an explanation because it is *self-evident*.

Yet reason is pesky stuff. Though forever at a remove from the object itself, reason can (and often does) add, subtract, or change the image that comes into contact with it. So we must adjust our picture:



¹ A true representation of the object image by the senses.

² A true or false representation after reason's handling.

One cannot assume reason will form a true belief.

¹⁰³ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Epicurus*, X.31 (end)–32 [*Epicurus*, 20]: “reason (*logos*) cannot refute them because reason depends upon the sense-perceptions (*aisthēseōn*).”

In the Roman Republic the poet Lucretius, an ardent exponent of Epicureanism, recounts many instances of *phantasia* which, he confesses, seem to exist to shake confidence (*fidem*) in sense-perception.¹⁰⁴ But then he adds his Epicurean explanation:

For the most part we are tripped up by beliefs (*opinitus*) of the rational soul (*animi*), which of itself makes additions, so that we “see” what is not actually there in the sensation of sight. Nothing is more difficult than to separate out the manifest facts from the dubious ideas tacked on afterwards by the rational soul.¹⁰⁵

Belief (Latin *opinio* = Greek *doxa*), which is reason at work, takes up positions which may be false.

At this point one might think we would be much better off without reason since sense-perception alone provides reliable and true contact with the real world. But Epicurus finds value in reason and expresses it in a key concept.

Prolēpsis: A Cognitive Anticipation

Epicurus gives a central role to *πρόληψις* (*prolēpsis*), which Cicero (in the voice of Velleius) explains is “an innate idea in the rational soul, without which nothing can be understood (*intelligi*), considered, or discussed.”¹⁰⁶ A *prolēpsis* is a cognitive “pre-notion”—an “anticipation” or “preconception”—of something not yet actually present. It is the product of repeated sense impressions registered and stored in memory. Thus a *prolēpsis* is a mental composite built and held within memory based on an accumulation of sense-

¹⁰⁴ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, IV.462–463.

¹⁰⁵ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, IV.464–468.

¹⁰⁶ Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* (*De Natura Deorum*), I.43 [16].

perceptions. In short, it is the epitome of how reason follows from sense-perception.

Diogenes Laertius remarks on the crucial place in the Epicurean system held by *prolēpsis*:

About *prolēpsin* they speak of it as if it is a ‘direct apprehension’ (*katalēpsis*), or a ‘correct belief’ (*doxa orthēn*), or a ‘notion’ (*ennoian*), or a ‘general understanding’ (*katholikēn noēsin*) being stored; that is to say, it is an advance recollection of external things that have many times appeared to us. An example: “Such and such a thing is a human being.” As soon as we say ‘human being,’ immediately a *prolēpsin* of such an image is thought of, as directed by sense-perceptions (*aisthēseōn*). In fact, the principal referent for everything we name is already implied and plain; we could not even seek what we search for without first having knowledge (*egnokeimen*) of it.¹⁰⁷

A *prolēpsis*, once built, can guide the process of sorting sense-perceptions and making sense of them.

Knowledge & Belief

In Epicurean epistemology *knowledge is a true representation of an actually existing object*. It is a mental representation that corresponds to physical reality. Accurate mental pictures and concepts must be formed or human cognition is hopeless. It is here that belief enters the picture. Belief belongs to the rational part of the

¹⁰⁷ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Epicurus*, X.33 [*Epicurus*, 21]. With the use here of *noēsin* (fr. νόησις) we might also note the remark of Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms*, 125 n. 15, on *nous* (νοῦς): “For the Epicurean *nous* operates somewhat in the fashion of the senses. It too may directly perceive the *eidola* given off by bodies but that are not, in this case, grasped by the senses.” See Tsouna, “Epicurean Preconceptions,” 164, on *prolēpsis* being rooted in atomic theory.

psyche and is tied to *prolēpsis*.¹⁰⁸ But while a *prolēpsis* in itself—as a composite mental representation—is a correct belief, that does not mean every belief is also correct. A given belief (*doxa*) can be a misapplication of a correct belief (*prolēpsis*), as for example, when a person mistakes a cow for a horse. The person may have very accurate mental pictures of both animals yet mistake one for the other.

Sextus Empiricus writes:

Of beliefs (*doxōn*), according to Epicurus these may be either true (*alētheis*) or false (*pseudeis*). Those that are true are confirmed by evidence, and not disconfirmed, having the quality of being self-evident (*enargeias*); those that are false are disconfirmed and not confirmed by evidence, lacking clarity (*enargeias*).¹⁰⁹

Diogenes Laertius writes similarly:

Now “belief” (*doxan*) they also call “supposition” (*hupolēpsin*), and they say it can be either true (*alēthe*) or

¹⁰⁸ David Konstan, “Commentary on Morel,” 50, writes, “[T]he Epicureans apparently reserved the terms ‘true’ and ‘false’ for what they called *doxa* and *hupolēpsis*, that is, belief and supposition, and belief evidently pertains to the rational part of the soul. A matter of belief (Gr. *doxaston*), according to Epicurus, ‘depends upon a previous thing that is clear’—this is no doubt a *prolēpsis*—to which we refer it when we say, ‘How do we know whether this is a human being?’ So, beliefs—which may be true or false—depend for their truth value on *prolēpsis*, which are clear; and *prolēpsis*, as we have seen, result from repeated sensations, which are incorrigible.”

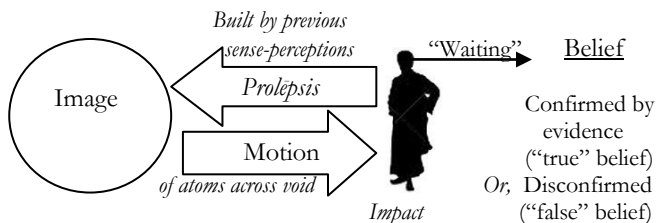
¹⁰⁹ Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Dogmatists: Against the Logicians*, I.211. The phrase “confirmed by evidence” renders ἐπιμαρτυρούμεναι (*epimarturoumenai*, fr. ἐπιμαρτυρέω), which might also be translated “supported” (by evidence or testimony); “disconfirmed by evidence” translates ἀντιμαρτυρούμεναι (*antimarturoumenai*, fr. ἀντιμαρτυρέω).

false (*pseude*). For if it is supported by confirming evidence and not contradicted by the same, it is true; if it is not supported by confirming evidence or is contradicted by it, then it is false. Because of this they introduced the watchword “waiting”—as in, waiting to draw closer to a thing to learn if the way it appears is truly the shape of a tower.¹¹⁰

This, we might say, is the Epicurean version of the idea of a ‘justified true belief.’ If sense-perception (*aisthēsis*) supports belief (*doxa*), then it is knowledge.

Knowledge is “true belief” in the sense that the belief formed while waiting for confirmation is indeed confirmed and not disconfirmed. Just as the initial belief follows from a store of previous perceptions, so the validated belief proceeds from direct apprehension; from beginning to end the matter is a physical process dependent upon the senses. The rational faculty¹¹¹ imperfectly cooperates, but knowledge is possible when sensory evidence is confirmed. Finally, it should be noted also that the Epicureans speak of *prolēpsis* is as *doxa orthēn*—“correct belief”—and by the company it keeps such *doxa* is rational in character.

Let us try to illustrate these ideas:

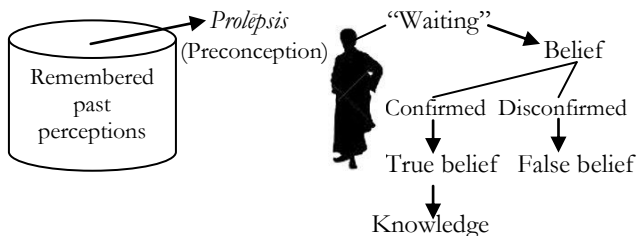


¹¹⁰ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Epicurus*, X.34 [*Epicurus*, 22].

¹¹¹ “Faculty” refers to an inherent mental ability or power.

Belief may be true or false, but it seems always to start as *impatient*. It forms as an internal motion (belief) that happens while waiting for supporting evidence, or for disconfirming evidence. Whether the belief be true or false it is associated with sense-perception having occurred before it; any error is a judgment from impatience while waiting on still unavailable evidence.

We are left with a composite picture for cognition somewhat like this:



The rational faculty relies on sense-perception (*aisthēsis*), accumulating a store of remembered past perceptions. These are grouped according to likeness—what we can call concept formation—to make available a mental picture that is an anticipation or preconception (*prolēpsis*). Such mental pictures are triggered by the mere mention of a word—‘man,’ ‘cow,’ ‘horse’—and immediately present this composite of stored and sorted past perceptions for use with respect to incoming sensory data. A *prolēpsis* generates belief (*doxa*) or a supposition (*hupolēpsis*) about the sensory image. Epicureans advise “waiting” (*prosmenon*) for confirmation or disconfirmation that the *prolēpsis*-belief is true. A confirmation means a belief is true and accordingly adds to the person’s store of knowledge. In sum, knowledge is a distal product of cognition following after sense-perception.

Chapter 6

Stoics: Champions of Reason

The Epicureans gained a following, but often less for their metaphysics or epistemology than for their ethical philosophy, which prized happiness and pleasure (and which in crasser forms devolved into hedonism). Their great rival, the Stoics, took up the same tasks of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, but with greater success, eventually becoming the most successful of the philosophical schools during the age of Hellenism and into the Roman world.

About the same time that Epicurus was formulating the philosophy that would bear his name, the philosopher Zeno of Citium (c. 334–c. 262 B.C.E.) was founding a new approach that would come to be known as Stoicism.¹¹² Though influenced by the ideas of Socrates and Plato,¹¹³ Aristotle,¹¹⁴ and Epicurus,¹¹⁵ the Stoics

¹¹² The name is derived from the covered porch (*Stoa*) in Athens where the first Stoics gathered and began to teach. See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Zeno*, VII.4–5. Attribution of Zeno as founder can be found in Cicero, *Academics* (*Academica*), I.42 [ch. XIII].

¹¹³ Though influenced by Platonic philosophy, Zeno and the Stoics strongly rejected Plato's theory of Forms. Zeno wrote his own *Republic*, copying Plato's title but in opposition to Plato's ideas; it has not survived.

¹¹⁴ The ancient geographer and historian Strabo (*Geography*, II.3.8) claimed of the prominent Stoic Posidonius that he did much imitat-

would quickly develop their own distinctive ideas, defending the possibility of achieving knowledge and engaging in vigorous philosophical debates with the other schools of the day, and their greatest opponents, the Skeptics. As an influential school of philosophy, Stoicism flourished for centuries, even being steadfastly practiced by the ‘philosopher-king’ of Rome, the emperor Marcus Aurelius, in the late 2nd century.

Stoicism is a complex philosophy developed over a significant period of time by many creative and strong-willed thinkers, making it challenging to adequately present its epistemology, and all the more complicated by the generally fragmentary nature of our sources for all but a few of the later Stoics. Among the most prominent Stoic philosophers are:

- Early Stoicism: Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus, and Diogenes of Babylon;
- Middle Stoicism: Panaetius of Rhodes, and Posidonius; and
- Later Stoicism: Gaius Musonius Rufus, Seneca, Epictetus, and the emperor Marcus Aurelius.

ing of Aristotle. Current opinions on Aristotle’s influence vary. Andrew Holowchak, *The Stoics*, 11, maintains “Stoic epistemology was not radically different from that of Aristotle, with the notable exception that the Stoics, because of attacks by Sceptics, had to grapple with the systematic defense of epistemology. . . .” But Harry Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 99, argues, “But although Stoic logic can be properly contrasted with that of Aristotle, there is little evidence that he exercised any important influence on its development.”

¹¹⁵ For example, Stoics also have a concept of *prolepsis*. Michael Frede, “Stoic Epistemology,” 295–96, points out that epistemologically the Stoic response to the problem of escaping belief to achieve knowledge was “patterned on the Epicurean response.” He briefly traces ways in which Stoic thinking followed the Epicurean lead.

In broad strokes, over time the Stoics became more and more interested in the practical side of a lived philosophy and less devoted to theoretical developments. Our interest in epistemological theory means, then, a rather greater share of attention will go to the early Stoics than to the later ones.

Zeno of Citium & Cleanthes: Foundations of Stoicism

In the days of the Late Roman Republic, Cicero—using the voice of the famed Roman Senator Marcus Porcius Cato Uticensis (Cato the Younger, 95–46 B.C.E.), a Stoic devotee—observes, “there is in Stoicism difficult reasoning (*ratio*) and a certain obscurity.” This uncontested declaration is attributed to the novelty of Stoic ideas when they were introduced, and to the accompanying vocabulary. About these things Cicero himself remarks that Zeno “with many things contrived unusual notions, and imposed them on things through a novel use of words.”¹¹⁶ Zeno, so to speak, constructed Stoic philosophy on the fly, appropriating existing words and investing them with his new meanings.¹¹⁷

The first Stoic leaders, Zeno and Cleanthes of Assos (c. 331–232 B.C.E.), lift reason to its most exalted

¹¹⁶ Cicero, *On Moral Ends* (*De Finibus*), III.15.

¹¹⁷ Pearson, *Fragments*, 34, notes, “The school afterwards became famous for their definitions (cf. Sext. Pyrrh. II. 205–212), and it is not unreasonable to suppose that the habit originated with the founder.” The Stoics seemed unconcerned by this practice; Chrysippus, according to Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* (*Noctes Atticae*), XI.12.12, “affirms that all words are by nature ambiguous, seeing that from the same word two or more senses are possible.”

state.¹¹⁸ Cicero captures how Zeno changes the way reason is viewed this way:

Whereas those who preceded him had not said that all virtue is in reason (*ratione*), but that some virtues have been perfected by Nature or by habit, Zeno fixed all virtue in reason (*ratione*). Whereas that earlier generation said those types of virtues I mentioned above could be separated, Zeno argued that it was in no way possible to do so, and instead judged that not merely the exercise of virtue was magnificent, but the virtuous character itself, and that it is impossible that virtue exist in anyone without that person constantly practicing it. Whereas his predecessors did not eliminate passion (*perturbationem*) from the rational soul (*animi*) that is in human beings, saying that it is human nature to suffer and desire and fear and experience joy, they also drew them together within narrow bounds, but Zeno taught that the wise is entirely free from all such ‘diseases’ as they might be termed. And whereas those men of old said that passions (*perturbationes*) are natural, and share nothing of reason (*rationis*), and so they placed passion (*cupiditatem*) in one part of the rational soul (*animi*) and reason (*rationem*) in another, Zeno could not give his assent (*assentiebatur*) to this. For Zeno, passions (*perturbationes*) were a matter of willing (*voluntarias*), and were caught up by a judgment of belief (*opiniosque iudicio*), and that a certain lack of moderation was the mother of all passions (*perturbationum*).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ See Cicero, *Academics*, II.126 [ch. XLI]; also Cleanthes, *Hymn to Zeus* (aka, *Hymn of Cleanthes*), 32–35.

¹¹⁹ Cicero, *Academics*, I.38–39 [ch. X].

The following key Stoic ideas emerge:

1. Epistemology and ethics merge as reason is made the ground of all virtue.
2. Reason and emotions are reconceived in how they relate to one another.
3. The ‘wise’ (e.g., Stoic philosophers) are so governed by reason as to be free of passions.

All of these notions would be controversial and each of them would evolve within Stoicism.

Sense-Perception, Appearances, & Assent

The Stoics think the Epicureans get things partly right and thereby are totally wrong. Stoics agree that to understand knowledge about reality one must begin with sense-perception (*aisthēsis*) and the appearances (*phantasia*) of objects accompanying it. Similarly to the Epicureans, the Stoics observe, “Although sense-perceptions are truthful, the *phantasia* they yield can be either true or false.”¹²⁰ But they sharply disagree with Epicureans on a key matter with respect to the “appearances.” Diogenes Laertius, quoting Diocles the Magnesian, writes:

The Stoics resolve to place first an explanation of “appearance” (*phantasia*) and sense-perception (*aisthēseōs*), inasmuch as the criterion by which the truth of things comes to be known (*ginōsketai*) is itself a kind of appearance (*phantasia*), and because the matter of assent, and of direct comprehension (*kataleptēseōs*), and of mental explanation, which precedes the rest, cannot be put together apart from appearance (*phantasias*). For appearance (*phan-*

¹²⁰ Pearson, *Fragments*, 61, as Zeno, fragment 8 [=Von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* (SVF), II.278].

tasia) comes first, then thought, which is at once ready to express the affect of the appearance (*phantasia*) by presenting an explanation (*logō*).¹²¹

Sextus Empiricus notes, “*phantasia* is, according to them, an ‘impression’ (*τυφōsis*) on the *psyche*.”¹²² Here we have a word used in a technical sense: *τυφōsis*, which can be variously rendered in English as “impression,” or “moulding,” or “imprinting,” or the like; it carries a basic sense of a “forming” upon something. Zeno names as *phantasia* (“appearances”) the actual physical impression made on the senses by stimuli¹²³—like a seal on wax.¹²⁴

But Zeno varies from Epicurus in calling attention to the decisive role played by the mind, through exercise of human will, to *assent* to certain of these appearances, but not all. The Greek term for “assent” is

¹²¹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Zeno*, VII.49 [Zeno, VII.36]: I have chosen to render νοήσεως λόγος (*noēseōs logos*) as “mental explanation” to better distinguish it from διάνοια (*dianoia*), which comes later; others have used choices such as “the understanding of a thing” or “thought.”

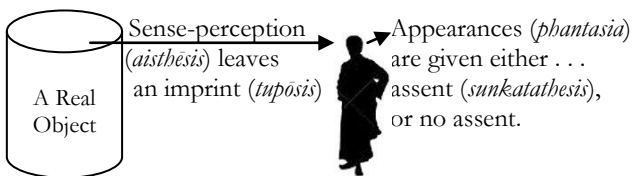
¹²² Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos: Against the Logicians*, I.228.

¹²³ “Sense-impression” is a common way of rendering *phantasia* despite the fact that “appearance” is more accurate. *Phantasia*, as it turns out, is not restricted to sense-impressions, but can be applied to thoughts, too.

¹²⁴ The term may well serve as one of the ‘obscurities’ Cicero mentions. Chrysippus, after Cleanthes, apparently aims to escape the rather more narrow possibilities of adhering to Cleanthes’—and presumably Zeno’s—sense of it as a physical pressing upon the *psyche*. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Zeno*, VII.50 [Zeno, 36] reports Diocles writing that Chrysippus in his book *On the Psyche* argues a *phantasia* makes an alteration (ἀλλοίωσις, *alloiōsis*) on the *psyche* more like an ongoing process than a one time product.

συγκατάθεσις (*sunkatathesis*).¹²⁵ The use of the word in this context is one of Zeno’s innovations; he borrows a term derived from the democratic process of casting votes to say that the mind does the same. Stobaeus in his ancient *Anthology* writes, “The Stoics did not make sense-perception (*aisthesis*) a matter of appearances (*phantasia*) alone, but made its essence dependent upon assent (*sunkatatheseōs*); for sense-perception is assent to a sensible (*aisthetikē*) appearance, with the assent being set into motion by oneself.”¹²⁶

We are now ready for a basic picture:



Zeno not only formulates the notion of assent, but makes it decisive and natural; the human mind naturally responds to appearances, weighing the evidence they present, and forming a judgment about them. Since

¹²⁵ The word derives from συγκατατίθημι (*sunkatatithēmi*). The form συγκατάθεσις is also found. To transliterate Greek into English, the Greek consonant γ has the English sound of ‘n’ when followed by certain consonants, such as κ, so this latter Greek form is quite understandable.

¹²⁶ Stobaeus, *Anthology*, I.49.25 (citing Porphyry’s *De Anima*) [= Von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* (SVF), II.74]. The word ὁρμήν (*hormēs*, from ὁρμή), carries the core sense of “impetus” and appears to be an idea that originated with the Stoics (see Sambursky, *Physics of the Stoics*, 62). In Stoic thinking, *hormē* can cover both a reasoned, voluntary choice and an irrational impulse. See Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, V.17: “natural desire of the soul, which the Greeks call ὁρμήν”: *appetitum animi, quem ὁρμήν Graeci vocant*.

Zeno the idea of assent has been important in philosophy, theology, psychology, and law. Obviously, though, one needs to decide on what basis assent should be given or withheld.

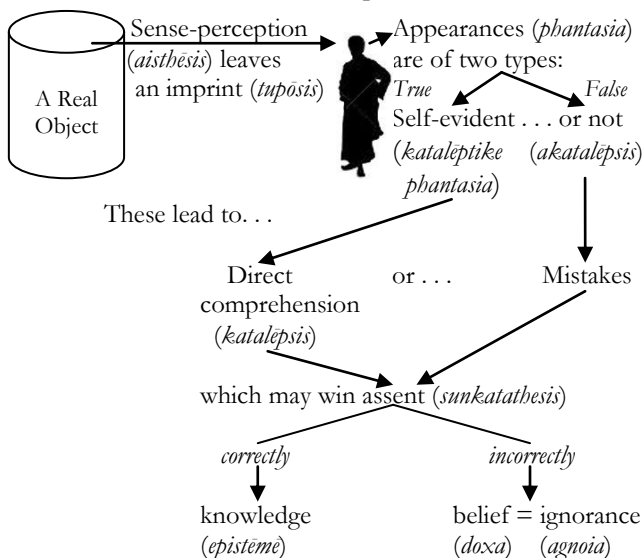
Katalēptike Phantasia & Katalēpsis

In the citation of Diocles the Magnesian by Diogenes Laertius is the notion settled upon by the Stoics as the criterion for determining which appearances should win the mind's assent as true. Some, but not all *phantasia* are sense-impressions that compel themselves on the mind by their immediacy such that they are truly comprehended (Latin *comprehensio*)—a comprehension of the appearance being “self-evident.” Such is *katalēpsis* and these the Stoics call true, because they are “self-evident appearances” (*katalēptike phantasia*). The *katalēptike phantasia* provide perceptions that cannot be doubted, precisely because they are self-evidently true.

As such they provide knowledge (Latin *scientiam* = Greek *epistēmē*).¹²⁷ But remember: not all appearances have such a quality; Stoics do not have the same trust in appearances that the Epicureans express. For Stoics the *phantasia* lacking such quality foster belief (Latin *opinio* = Greek *doxa*) and belief is ignorance (Latin *inscientiam* = Greek *agnoia*), because it is feeble and cannot be distinguished from what is false or unknown. Therefore, it is *katalēpsis* that provides the decisive criterion for distinguishing between knowledge and belief.

¹²⁷ See Stough, *Greek Skepticism*, 62. On the Stoic sense of *epistēmē* see Stobaeus, *Anthology* (Eclogues), II.74 [=Von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* (SVF), III.112] (English translation of this passage in Long and Sedley, *Hellenistic Philosophers*, 256).

We must thus add to our basic picture:



Clearly, one does not want to assent incorrectly!

To assent wrongly to an appearance is thereby to mistake belief for knowledge; that is truly ignorance. But is it enough to declare that some object appearances are “self-evident”? What does that mean?

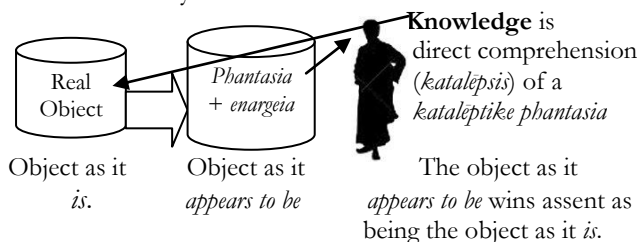
A key part in deciding to give assent to an appearance as “self-evident”—i.e., as *kataleptike phantasia*—is its “clarity” or “distinctness” (*enargeia*).¹²⁸ The idea of *enargeia* is that objects naturally yield appearances to the senses that reveal the object. Thus sensory data typically presents itself in a clear, self-evident manner so that

¹²⁸ For a history of the concept of *enargeia* (ἐναργεία), see Hedrick, “Seeing the Unseeable.” The discussion of Hellenistic philosophy is found in chapter 4 (Epicureanism, 69–98; Stoicism, 99–123).

it can be used as a guiding rule in determining the truth of an appearance and, subsequently, whether it yields knowledge of an object (i.e., of the object as it *is* and not merely as it *appears to be*). The concept expresses trust in sense-perception as able to capture the self-revealing properties of an object. The term is important both in Stoicism and Epicureanism, and therefore receives significant attention by the Skeptics, too. The Stoics apparently borrow it from the Epicureans, but reconstitute it to fit their own epistemology.¹²⁹

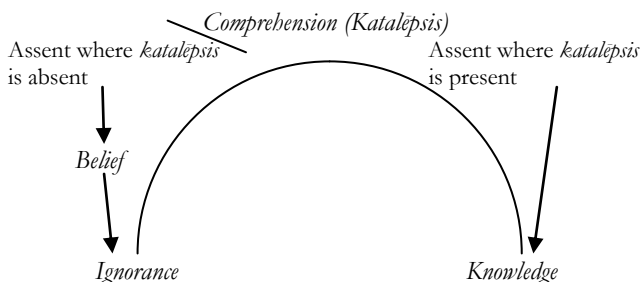
That both *katalēpsis* and *enargeia* convey in English the sense of being “self-evident” is telling. The former is a way of saying that the mind immediately grasps—comprehends—the appearance because of its clear, distinct, self-evident nature. But the comprehension is not merely of the *phantasia* but of the actual object itself. Thus the self-evident appearance (i.e., of the way a thing *appears to be*) can also yield knowledge (i.e., of the way a thing *is*).

Thus epistemology fulfils metaphysics. We can illustrate it this way:



¹²⁹ On the issue of Stoic “borrowing” of the term from Epicureanism, see Hedrick, “Seeing the Unseeable,” 99–100. Among those Hedrick cites, especially see Sandbach, “Ennoia and Prolepsis,” 32. The Stoics also borrow the term *prolepsis*, which they use similarly as a “preconception.”

Though the Stoic conception adds some new dimensions, it is recognizably similar to some of the thinking we have seen before. Like Plato and Aristotle, the Stoics see three epistemological states: ignorance, belief, and knowledge. But unlike their predecessors the Stoics conclude that a difference that makes no difference is no difference, and so belief is practically equivalent to ignorance. The Stoic continuum looks like this:



The Stoic attitude toward belief is caught by Cleanthes, who is recorded by Clement of Alexandria as having written in his *Poetics* the following verse:

Do not look to belief, wishing to say “I have become wise,” / nor fear the lack of judgment and shameless belief of the many; / for the multitude do not have wise, nor righteous, nor good judgment, / which is something discovered in few people.¹³⁰

One need neither endorse nor fear belief; what is needed is acknowledging the reality of its existence in order to avoid its limitations.

¹³⁰ Cleanthes’ *Poetics* as quoted by Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies*, V.3. The phrase “lack of judgment” translates ἀκριτον (*akriton*); the word “judgment” renders κρισιν (*kerisin*).

Sextus Empiricus helps us make sense of the place of belief and of the entire Stoic continuum:

They profess there are three things mutually linked: knowledge (*epistēmēn*), and belief (*doxan*), and between them, contiguous to both, comprehension (*katalepsin*). Of these three, knowledge is said to be certain and stable and confirmed by reason. But belief is weak and a false assent. Comprehension, between these two, is assent attached to a direct apprehension of some appearance (*kataleptikes phantasias*); according to them, *kataleptike phantasia* is true and of such a kind that it cannot be false. They further claim that of these, knowledge is found only in the wise, while belief is found only in the worthless—but comprehension is found going both directions, and it is the criterion established for truth.¹³¹

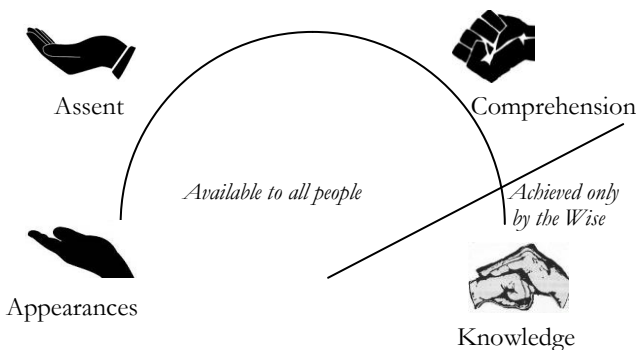
Cicero helps too in offering this anecdote:

And Zeno would perform gestures to illustrate: he would show his hand with outstretched fingers and say, “This is what an appearance (*visum*) is like.” Then he would close his fingers a little and say, “This is what assent (*adsensus*) is like.” Next he would press his fingers together so as to make a fist and say of it that it was like comprehension (*comprehensionem*)—and with this illustration he for the first time used the word *katalepsis* for that matter. At last he would raise his left hand, vigorously

¹³¹ Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos: Against the Logicians*, I, I.151–152. The word translated “certain” is ἀσφαλῆ (*asphalē*), which has the sense of being completely “secure.” The phrase “confirmed by reason” translates ἀμετάθετον ὑπὸ λόγου (*ametatheton hypo logou*). The word translated “assent” is each time a form of συγκατάθεσις (*sunkatathesis*). The word “worthless” renders (*phaulois*), which suggests an ordinary person prone to wickedness; the term joins ethics to the epistemological thrust here. Also see I.38–44, where Sextus discusses the Stoic distinction between “truth” and “true.”

squeeze his right hand's fist, and then declare that this is what knowledge (*scientiam*) is like, which no one save the Wise possess; but who the 'Wise' are or have been none of the Stoics are accustomed to say.¹³²

We can use the above to redraw our continuum:



Sextus is blunt: for the Stoic the “wise” are those who have not only learned to distinguish true appearances so that they directly comprehend reality as it *is*, but they do so habitually. Everyone else is a “fool” because they lack the discipline to keep themselves from giving false assent to many things that only *appear to be* and mistakenly believe them to be the way things *are*.

Middle Stoicism

The period of Middle Stoicism (2nd -1st centuries B.C.E.) shows both continuity and discontinuity with the views of Early Stoicism. Prominent figures of Middle Stoicism include Diogenes of Babylon, Antipater of Tarsus, Panaetius of Rhodes, and especially Posidonius of Apameia and Rhodes, the leading Stoic thinker of

¹³² Cicero, *Academics*, II.145.

this period. Of these, our interest is on Panaetius now, and later, as we consider emotions, Posidonius.

Panaetius

Panaetius of Rhodes (c. 185-c. 110 B.C.E.), who studied under Diogenes of Babylon and Antipater of Rhodes, is commonly reckoned as the initiator of a second phase in Stoic development known as Middle Stoicism. The changes brought about in Middle Stoicism often reflect the influence of renewed attention to Plato, and especially to his work *Timaeus*. Panaetius reports his favorable use of the work of both Plato and Aristotle.¹³³

Panaetius' reputation and the preservation of his work owes much to Stoicism's contact with the Roman world. Panaetius, himself born into a prominent family, benefited from his relationship with the prominent nobleman of the Roman Republic, Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus Numantinus (185–129 B.C.E.), more commonly known as Scipio Africanus Minor, with whom he stayed in Rome. Panaetius spent some fifteen years there furthering the reach of Stoic thought before returning to Athens to become Scholarch in 129 B.C.E. Influential in his own right, he had a number of notable students, the most prominent of them being Posidonius (below).

¹³³ On Panaetius' use of Plato and Aristotle (and Theophrastus), see Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, IV.79. Also see Philodemus, *Index of Stoics* (*Index Stoicorum Herculanensis* (*Herculaneum Papyri* 1018, column 61)). This papyrus records the succession in Stoicism. See Traversa, *Index Stoicorum Herculanensis*. Also see Von Arnim, *Bemerkungen zum Index*. Posidonius is said to have drawn directly on at least three of Aristotle's works, including *On the Soul*, and upon Theophrastus as well. See Leyra, "Aristotelian Corpus."

Of an independent mind, Panaetius varies from his Stoic colleagues in a number of ways. For example, he shows disdain for astrology—then widely accepted among Stoics—and disagreed with certain ideas of physics stemming from Zeno. His turn to an apparent concentration on ethics may well be explained by the interests of his sophisticated Roman audience on that matter in particular. In modifying existing Stoic ideas on the subject he appears to have shifted focus from the life of the Sage to what is possible for any person—the so-called “appropriate actions” (καθήκοντα, *kathēkonta*) any conscientious Roman would care about. However, we must be careful not to exaggerate the extent of changes introduced; in most respects Panaetius remained solidly within what was recognized as ‘orthodox’ Stoicism.¹³⁴

As for Panaetius’ own work, little is known outside of what Cicero has preserved of his work on ethics titled *Peri tou Kathēkontos* (*Concerning Appropriate Action* or simply, *On Duty*), which was written about 139 B.C.E.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Sedley, “The School,” 24, aptly remarks, “On the vast majority of philosophical issues, what we know of both Panaetius and Posidonius places them firmly within the main current of Stoic debate.”

¹³⁵ See Cicero’s *On Duties* (*De officiis*), books I-II. Cicero, III.7, remarks that he has mostly followed Panaetius’ *On Appropriate Actions* while making some modifications: *Panaetius igitur, qui sine controversia de officiis accuratissime disputavit, quemque nos correctione quadam adhibita potissimum secuti sumus*. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 211, declares “It is certain that Cicero based the first two books of this work upon Panaetius, and through Cicero Panaetius might fairly be regarded as the most influential of all Stoic philosophers.” As for discerning what in Cicero’s work comes from himself and what in Panaetius, Guthrie in his translation of *Cicero De Officiis*, 2, remarks, “That part of it in which he has followed Panaetius, is sensible, clear, and undeniable, in most of its definitions, descriptions, and inferences; but

Panaetius' ethical treatise, as the above remarks suggest, shows independence from what had preceded it in Stoic thought. One such way marks a departure from Zeno. We may recall that the founder of Stoicism had studied under the Cynic philosopher Crates and thereafter maintained a Cynic lifestyle personally. But Panaetius shifts Stoicism consciously away from any resemblance to Cynic ethics.¹³⁶

Unfortunately, though his lines of thinking about ethics are clear enough and his contribution to the subject distinctive, we have far less confidence about his views on epistemology.¹³⁷ What little we have makes his ideas seem squarely within the mainstream. It is plain, for example, that Panaetius maintains the Stoic exaltation of reason. Cicero records Panaetius' conviction that what separates human beings from beasts is the power of reason. He writes:

But a human being, as one partaking of reason, discerns consequences, considers the causes of things and how they proceed, and also, as it were, connects these so that he is not ignorant of how what proceeds relates to both cause and effect; he is able to see resemblances, and

having little room for introducing into any part of it his favourite accomplishment, he is sometimes dry, tedious, and tautologous, and it is easy to see when he deviates from the accurate Greek, in order to give himself the air of an original."

¹³⁶ Billerbeck, "The Ideal Cynic," 206, writes, "So far as we can judge from Book 1 of Cicero's *De Officiis* the elimination of the Cynic heritage of Stoic ethics was the aim of Panaetius."

¹³⁷ Tarant, "Peripatetic and Stoic Epistemology," 30, observes, "Our evidence for Middle Stoic epistemology is thin, and the details must remain clouded." As for Panaetius himself, Watson, "Stoic Theory of Knowledge," 74, comments, "We have no record of any discussion by Panaetius of the actual process of knowing."

to connect the present to future, so that he is readily able to look at the entire course of his life and prepare those things necessary for it.¹³⁸

By the natural power of reason, Panaetius continues, human beings form bonds through language and interaction, and preeminently through family. Reason prompts civic connections and public involvements, all motivated by the rational desire to care for loved ones and all to whom is owed a responsibility of care.¹³⁹

The above demonstrates what Aristotle would call ‘practical reason’—the mind’s rational faculty bent toward the use of knowledge to deal with specific things in living. But Panaetius, still in an Aristotelian frame of mind, then declares, “Foremost in the human being is the distinguishing trait of seeking and questing after truth.” Thus, when freed from the urgent demands of practical reason, a person looks and listens “to learn more and acquire knowledge.” People are naturally curious about the world in which they live. But such seeking after truth is never purely theoretical reflection: “To this passion for truth is yoked a grasping for supremacy”—by which he means, as he immediately makes clear, an independence of mind that is only willing to submit to rational rules for the benefit of all.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Panaetius in Cicero, *On Duties*, I.4.11: *homo autem, quod rationis est particeps, per quam consequential cernit, causas rerum videt earumque praegressus et quasi antecessiones non ignorant, similitudines comparat rebusque praesentibus adiungit atque annectit futuras, facile totius vitae cursum videt ad eamque degendam praeparat res necessarias.*

¹³⁹ Panaetius in Cicero, *On Duties*, I.4.12.

¹⁴⁰ Panaetius in Cicero, *On Duties*, I.4.13. First quote: *In primisque hominis est propria veri inquisitio atque investigatio.* Second quote: *addiscere cognitionemque.* Third quote: *Huic veri videndi cupiditati adiuncta est appetitio quaedam principatus. . . .*

The whole point is that same human being who is endowed by nature with an ability to perceive and admire the world also can understand its order, frame a corresponding personal order in harmony with Nature, and thus construct the kind of moral virtue that is the point of his treatise.¹⁴¹

The Stoics join knowledge and virtue as tightly together as possible. Panaetius is no exception. In identifying four sources of moral rightness, he prioritizes the first, which “consists in knowledge of the truth.” He reiterates his conviction that this resonates with human nature. “Indeed, all people are drawn to and regard highly the acquiring of knowledge (*cognitionis*) and desire knowledge (*scientiae*) itself—and reckon as illustrious one who so excels. At the same time, we regard as evil and shameful those who slip and go astray, have fallen into ignorance, or have been deceived.”¹⁴²

Panaetius points to two paths to error to be avoided. The first is classic Stoic thinking: “not to hold what is unknown (*incognita*) as known (*cognitis*) and also blindly assent (*assentiamur*) to it.”¹⁴³ To this is joined advice Aristotle would applaud, that in avoiding this error a person “will apply close inspection and diligent attentiveness” to things encountered. The second error he identifies can easily lead to the first: “A further error

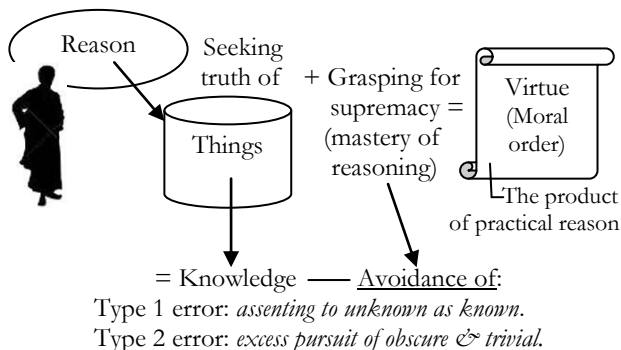
¹⁴¹ Panaetius in Cicero, *On Duties*, I.4.14.

¹⁴² Panaetius in Cicero, *On Duties*, I.5.18. First quote: *qui in veri cognitione consistit*; on the other three sources, see I.5.15. Panaetius argues all four are entwined but each prompts specific kinds of duties. Second quote: *Omnes enim trahimur et ducimur ad cognitionis et scientiae cupidatem, in qua excellere pulchrum putamus, labi autem, errare, nescire, decipi et malum et turpe ducimus*.

¹⁴³ Panaetius in Cicero, *On Duties*, I.5.18: *ne incognita pro cognitis habeamus iisque temere assentiamur*.

is found in those who give too much and too great devotion to the pursuit of obscure and difficult things, things that are by no means important anyway.”¹⁴⁴

We can illustrate all this as follows:



Knowledge, plus a mastery of the art of reasoning, which is grasping what to give assent to, equals the development of a personal and social moral order, which

¹⁴⁴ Panaetius in Cicero, *On Duties*, I.5.18-19. First quoted material: *adhibebit ad considerandas . . . et diligentiam*. Second quote: *Alterum est vitium, quod quidam nimis magnum studium multamque operam in res obscuras atque difficiles conferunt easdemque non necessarias*. On this point, cf. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, I.7 “not to engage in imitation of the Sophists or write about speculative matters”: τὸ μὴ ἐκτραπῆναι εἰς ζῆλον σοφιστικόν, μηδὲ τὸ συγγράφειν περὶ τῶν θεωρημάτων (*to me ektrapēnai eis zēlon Sophistikón, mēde to sungraphein peri ton theōrematōn*). Guthrie draws attention to this later Stoic remark in a note in his translation of *Cicero De Officiis*, 15. Sandbach, *The Stoics*, 123-24, in tracing Panaetius’ thinking from Cicero’s treatment, says he upheld the Stoic conviction of reason’s importance and the human desire to know truth (the possession of wisdom). Human beings must navigate the hazard of falsely believing they know what they do not know, which leads to unwarranted confidence. On the Type 2 error, compare with Theophrastus’ remarks (end of chapter 7).

is the Stoic ethical ideal. Thus knowledge equals virtue and practical reason trumps theoretical.

What suited Roman sensibilities was the practical emphasis—applied Stoicism, as it were—which Panaetius articulated. While ethics and morality always had been a focus of Stoic thinking, constituting alongside physics and logic what the Stoics conceived of as a single system, Panaetius' brilliance lay in developing a practical morality designed for ordinary people (which is to say, suited for the non-philosophers who might never be the 'wise' of the Stoic ideal, but who desired to live an upright, good life). His work helped popularize Stoicism in the Roman world and paved the way for the period of Late Stoicism.

In sum, during early and middle Stoicism the Stoics make knowledge not merely a *possession* but a *state* of mind achieved by consistent application of self-discipline—the essence of ethics. This has important consequences, of which we will consider two.

Knowledge & Emotions

One consequence of the practice of Stoic discipline is touted to be freedom from unruly passions. Put a bit differently, Stoic discipline keeps reason in charge and the ability to discern what are true appearances and only give assent to them means practical living in accord with the way things really *are* and not as they often *seem* to be. Control of emotions provides a perfect example of Stoic epistemology in ethical action.

Chrysippus of Soli (279–206 B.C.E.), the successor to Cleanthes as head of the Stoic School, took up and also modified earlier ideas, such as Zeno’s conception of emotions. Chrysippus’ *On Affections* (*Peri Pathōn*) identifies four “affections”¹⁴⁵ that are often called “generic feelings” (γενικά παθή, *genika pathē*), and which commonly are judged as ‘good’ (desire and pleasure), or ‘bad’ (fear and pain). One member of each pair relates to the present (pleasure and pain), and the other to the future (desire and fear).¹⁴⁶

His position is that feelings belong to the rational part of the *psyche*.¹⁴⁷ But what distinguishes Chrysippus’ position is his step in identifying feelings as beliefs (*doxan*). He has in mind exactly the basic sense of *doxa* as the taking up of a position; feelings, in his view, express judgments. Feelings are a particular species of *doxa*—belief judgments of a feeling that something is good or bad, a present fact or a future expectation. In other words, and startlingly provocative to many, emotions do not follow *from* beliefs but *are* beliefs.

¹⁴⁵ “Affections” being understood here in the psychological sense of “affect,” or as we more commonly say, “feeling” or “emotion.”

¹⁴⁶ Stobaeus, *Anthology* (*Eclogues*), II.90–92, in *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, III.394. The four basic “affections” (πάθος, *pathos*) are: pain (or “distress”: λύπη, *lypē*), pleasure (ἡδονή, *hedonē*), fear (φόβος, *phobos*), and desire (or “appetite”: ἐπιθυμία, *epithumia*).

¹⁴⁷ Galen, *The Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*, IV.2.2 (cf. V.1.4), claims that Chrysippus “judges that beliefs (δόξαν) and expectations arise in the rational part only” of the human soul. The phrase “rational part” renders λογιστικῶ (*logistikō*, fr. λογιστικός).

Emotions as beliefs—or what we may cautiously name ‘emotional beliefs’—are said by Chrysippus to have certain characteristics. These include:

- “Rationality” (*logistikos*);
- Judgment (*krisis*) as supposition (*hupolepsis*);
- Erraticism, or exceeding motion (*ptoia*);
- Immediacy (i.e., “freshness” (*prosphatos*)); and
- Impermanence.

“Rationality” (*logistikos*) here can easily be misunderstood, which is why I have put it inside quotation marks. In Stoicism, *logos* reigns and the cognition of belief is ruled by reason, a function of the mind. This is not the same as *logos* being used normatively—guiding decisions, motivating actions, and serving as a foundation for evaluations. Instead, in that latter respect, emotions are *irrational* in that *doxa* replaces *logos*.

Here we again see the role of the human will and the importance of assent. In emotions one finds quick judgments of an erratic and impermanent nature. Framed as Chrysippus sets out it isn’t difficult to see emotions as beliefs. But his is hardly the final word on the matter.

Posidonius

A century later, Posidonius (c. 135–c. 50 B.C.E.), a representative of so-called ‘Middle Stoicism,’¹⁴⁸ offers some further reflections on the matter. He, too, wrote a

¹⁴⁸ The changes brought about in Middle Stoicism often reflect the influence of renewed attention to Plato, and especially to his work *Timaeus*. Panaetius, the initiator of this stage in Stoicism, reports favorable use of the work of both Plato and Aristotle. See Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, IV.79.

work entitled *On Affections*. Posidonius' view is that emotions (which produce discord and unhappiness) have their origin in the human failure to live in accord with the nature that rules both divine and human—indeed, the whole universe—namely, reason. Instead, at times they depart from the rational part of the *psyche* to that part which is like the nature of animals and let themselves be carried along by it.¹⁴⁹

Posidonius advises that we cultivate a way of “living in advance.” He distinguishes movements in the *psyche* as including both emotions proper and what we might call “anticipations,” or anticipatory movements—a kind of pre-emotional state. The mind imagines and a feeling might follow. But it does not *have* to follow. According to Galen, Posidonius advocates using this pre-emotional state to anticipate what might happen, accustom ourselves to it, and thus escape any sudden rush to judgment such as Chrysippus describes.¹⁵⁰ By mentally handling in advance matters as though they have already occurred we rob them of their power to surprise and overwhelm our judgment if they do actually occur at some point.

¹⁴⁹ Galen, *The Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*, V.6.4. See Wringe, “Posidonius on Emotions,” 194–196, on the “irrational tug” (*pathetikē holkē*) behind false suppositions.

¹⁵⁰ Galen, *The Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*, IV.7.7–8 (*Corpus Medicorum Graecorum*, V 4,1,2, p. 283).

Posidonius' thinking is, in turn, picked up and modified by a prominent member of 'Late Stoicism'.¹⁵¹ Lucius Annaeus Seneca, commonly referred to as Seneca the Younger (c. 1 B.C.E. –65 C.E.), is often remembered as the tutor of the young Nero. But his moral essay *On Anger* (*De Ira*) will serve us for a glimpse into his Stoic epistemology and, especially, his innovations with respect to thinking about emotions.

In book II of *On Anger* Seneca addresses whether or not anger is a judgment (*iudicio*)—a decision roused from ignorance or knowingly.¹⁵² He writes:

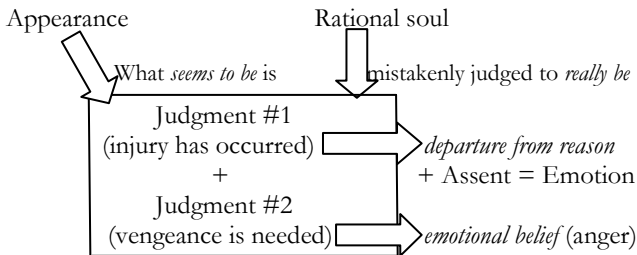
That anger is roused by the appearance of an injury is undoubtable; but the question at hand is whether anger immediately follows an appearance, springing forth without assent of the rational soul, or whether it is set in motion with the rational soul's assent. Our position is that anger undertakes nothing on its own, but instead depends on the rational soul's approval. To take hold of an appearance as having received an injury, and add longing to avenge it, is to join under one yoke two things—that one ought not to have been injured and one ought not to withhold vengeance—and this is no mere impulse set in motion involuntarily. An impulse is a simple thing, but this is a complex matter comprised of many parts: someone has perceived something, has been offended by it, has condemned it, and now seeks to be avenged. None of

¹⁵¹ From the beginning, in concord with Socrates, the Stoics posited the closest possible correlation between knowledge and virtue. In Late Stoicism, a period in which they became the most popular philosophy among the Romans, the Stoics emphasized practical epistemology in articulating their ethics—a way of virtue.

¹⁵² Seneca, *On Anger* (*De Ira*), II.1.1.

this is possible unless the rational soul assents to the appearance which strikes it.¹⁵³

In such manner Seneca completes a Stoic logical development in thinking of emotions as beliefs that take up a position by giving assent to mistaken impressions. We can illustrate his thinking:



Something appears and it impacts the rational soul (*animus*). Judgments are stirred; these assess an appearance as either self-evidently true or as not so. Belief stemming from ignorance makes the faulty judgment that something not self-evidently true has been truly comprehended—in this case that injury has occurred and vengeance is justified—and assents to this belief. The result is not true knowledge but false belief (emotional belief).

He writes in *On Anger*:

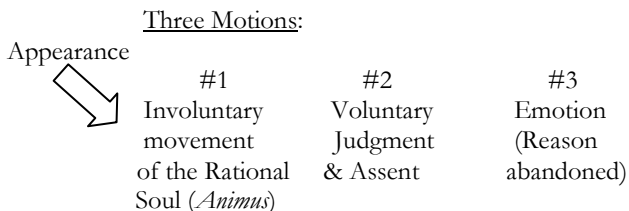
So that you may know (*scias*) in what manner ignoble passions begin, increase, and run wild, note that at first there is an involuntary internal motion—just a setting of the stage for ignoble passion and thus a kind of threat—which when joined with an act of the will, albeit not an

¹⁵³ Seneca, *On Anger*, II.1.3–5. The words translated “appearance” are forms of the word *species*. The word “position” renders *placet* (fr. *placeo*).

unyielding one, convinces me it is necessary I require vengeance when I am injured, or that it is necessary another face punishment right here and now for some wickedness done. This third movement (ignoble passions run wild) is now uncontrollable which no longer as a matter of the will seeks vengeance, but simply does so because it has overwhelmed reason (*rationem*). There is no possibility of escape by reason (*ratione*) from the initial thrust that occurs in the mind, just as there is no escape from the blow it brings to the body. It is as involuntary as when we yawn because another does, or blink when somebody thrusts fingers toward our eyes. Reason (*ratio*) is unable to be victorious in such cases, though perhaps by practice and vigilant attention we can reduce the power of ignoble passions. Different is that internal motion which has proceeded from judgment (*iudicio*) and has exalted it.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Seneca, *On Anger*, II.4.1–2. The phrase “ignoble passions” translates *adfectus* a Latin correspondent to the Greek term *pathos* and especially used by Seneca in the sense of ‘base’ or ‘dishonorable’ emotions. The phrase “internal motion” renders *motus*, which corresponds here with the Stoic sense of how emotions are a movement within—a notion adapted by Seneca’s next qualifying phrase (which is similar to Posidonius’ thinking). The phrase “setting of the stage” renders *praeparatio*, a “preparation” that makes possible the subsequent development. The phrase “has exalted” translates *tollitur*, a term clearly parallel to *nascitur* (has proceeded) and in context seems to refer with it to the movement associated with emotion. Latin text: *Et ut scias quemadmodum incipiant affectus aut crescant aut efferantur, est primus motus non voluntarius, quasi praeparatio affectus et quaedam comminatio ; alter cum voluntate non contumaci, tamquam oporteat me vindicari, cum laesus sim, aut oporteat hunc poenas dare, cum scelus fecerit ; tertius motus est iam impotens, qui non si oportet ulcisci vult, sed utique, qui rationem evicit. Primum illum animi ictum effugere ratione non possumus, sicut ne illa quidem quae diximus accidere corporibus, ne nos oscitatio aliena sollicitet, ne oculi ad intimationem subitam digitorum comprimantur. Ista non potest ratio vincere, consuetudo fortasse et adsidua observatio extenuat. Alter ille mo-*

This, too, can be pictured, as follows:



Here we find the notion that the first discernible internal motion is anticipatory in nature; it is not itself yet emotion, but sets the stage for it.¹⁵⁵ But once the will improperly chooses to indulge the initial, involuntary motion through assent to it a very steep and slippery slope presents itself. Assent to erroneous judgments produces a departure from reason; the ignoble passions run riot and reason is nowhere in sight. Reason cannot control whether the initial motion occurs, but it is a human decision whether it then leads to emotion or not.

The Stoic Sage, or “wise” one, accepts that the involuntary movement of the rational soul will occur after some appearances. But because he or she is wise, no

tus, qui iudicio nascitur, iudicio tollitur. Cf. II.3.1, “None of these things that move the rational soul by chance should be called ignoble passion; rather we should say the rational soul *endures* them, not causes them”: *Nihil ex his, quae animum fortuito impellunt, adfectus vocari debet; ista, ut ita dicam, patitur magis animus quam facit.*

Cf. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, V.19, on the *psyche*: “but it turns and moves itself alone”: *τρέπει δὲ καὶ κινεῖ αὐτὴ ἑαυτὴν μόνῃ (trepei de kai kinei autē heautēn monē).*

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Hierocles, *Elements of Ethics*, VI.17–20 [= Ramelli, *Hierocles the Stoic*, 16–17] with respect to *aisthēsis* as an “initiating” (*ἀρχική, archikē*) faculty. On the origins of the Stoic concept of “pre-emotions” (*προπάθειαι, propatheiai*) see Graver, “Philo of Alexandria.”

voluntary judgment and assent to what merely *seems to be* will lead to an abandonment of reason. And what is true with respect to emotional regulation is true with respect to the rest of life—and makes possible the practice of virtue.

Stoic Knowledge & Ethics

Around the turn into the 2nd century, the philosopher Aëtius, relying on older work, offered as a starting summary of Stoic philosophy the following:

The Stoics stand firm on certain points, such as that wisdom (*sophian*) is knowledge (*epistēmēn*) of matters divine and human and that philosophy is the habitual practice of that skill (*technēs*) fitted to it which, first and foremost, is virtue. Virtues (*aretas*) are of three kinds: natural, ethical, and logical. This requires of philosophy a same threefold partition in things concerning nature, ethics, and logic. And when dealing with nature the focus is on the world and living things; in ethics the focus is on the conduct of human living; and with logic the focus is *logos* (*ton logon*), which they also call ‘dialectic.’¹⁵⁶

Musonius Rufus

Ethics, Aëtius says, is about the conduct of human beings. For the Stoic righteous conduct—virtue—is the same as wisdom and is knowledge. How could it not be? Gaius Musonius Rufus (c. 29–c. 100 C.E.), known as the ‘Roman Socrates,’ a younger contemporary of Seneca in the 1st century and another representative of

¹⁵⁶ Aëtius, *Opinions of the Philosophers*, I. Prooemium 2. My translation is based on the Greek text in Diels, *Doxographi Graeci*. The phrase “habitual practice” translates ἀσκησιν (*askēsin*, fr. ἄσκησις), which typically describes a way of life, or the rigorous regimen of an athlete.

Late Stoicism, proclaims, “knowledge (*epistēmē*) is about life, and nothing else—and this is philosophy.”¹⁵⁷ He teaches that human beings are naturally equipped to live virtuous lives and that one evidence for this is the universal expectation of virtue in all people.¹⁵⁸ The best course for young and old alike is to live in accord with nature—*human* nature—which seeks its own excellence in virtue.¹⁵⁹

Epictetus

The most famous pupil of Musonius Rufus is Epictetus (c. 50–135 C.E.), born a Greek slave in Hierapolis of Asia Minor. Epictetus demonstrates the practical emphasis of this period of Stoicism. He argues that human beings, having been granted a “rational faculty with its ability to rightly understand how to use what appears to us,”¹⁶⁰ means that, “if you cultivate this, and place all in its keeping, you will never be hindered, never thwarted, never moan, never blame, never flatter anyone.”¹⁶¹ In short, one will be in control of one’s emotions and behavior.

For Epictetus—who as a slave certainly knew the idea from lived experience—the decisive principle is *control*. A person must understand what is and what is

¹⁵⁷ Musonius Rufus, *Lectures*, 3.13–14 ἐπιστήμη δὲ περὶ βίον οὐχ ἑτέρα τις ἢ φιλοσοφία ἐστὶ (*epistēmē de peri bion ouch hetera tis ē philosophia estī*). Also see 4.18–20.

¹⁵⁸ Musonius Rufus, *Lectures*, 2.1–4.

¹⁵⁹ Musonius Rufus, *Lectures*, 17.

¹⁶⁰ Epictetus in Arrian, *Discourses*, I.1.5. The word “appropriate” translates χρηστική (*chrēstikē*, fr. χρηστικός) which is the ability to know how to use something—in this case, the things that appear (*tais phantasiais*) to the mind (whether sensory data or ideas).

¹⁶¹ Epictetus in Arrian, *Discourses*, I.1.12.

not within one's own power. Reason is a divine gift put into human control; we can use or misuse the rational faculty. He presents instances of people in extreme instances where control of their body's fate was in the hands of others, as in men led to execution. Epictetus then engages in an imagined dialog:

“What, then, should one have ready at hand for such circumstances?”

What other than this?—what is mine or not mine, what is within my power and what is not. I must die; must I die moaning? I must be fettered; must I also wail? I must go into exile; is there, then, anyone to prevent me from doing so with a smile, a cheerful countenance, and a sense of well-being?¹⁶²

What is *inside* me is what I can control; what is outside me is exactly that—*outside*. From what is within my power I can choose how I live—virtuously or in emotional distress. Epictetus adds the tagline, “These are the matters philosophers should think about, write about daily, exercise themselves in.”¹⁶³ Ultimately, knowledge and virtuous living are truly *human*.

¹⁶² Epictetus in Arrian, *Discourses*, I.1.21–22.

¹⁶³ Epictetus in Arrian, *Discourses*, I.1.25.

Chapter 7

Skeptics: Champions of Doubt

The most fundamental idea shared by the Epicureans and Stoics—and by Aristotle’s Peripatetics and other philosophical schools—is that knowledge *is* possible. They are what Skeptics call “dogmatists.” Though they mean the term as a criticism, a Stoic like Epictetus warmly embraced it. He uses the word δόγμα (*dogma*; pl. *dogmata*) 114 times in his *Discourses*. A word often translated as “opinions,” in the period of Imperial Rome it carried the sense of Senatorial decrees, i.e., ‘official opinions,’ or ‘judgments.’ For Epictetus and other Stoics an assent based on a correct judgment (i.e., one using good *dogma*) leads to good, while one based on an incorrect judgment leads to bad. A *dogma* is a “belief,” but not like *doxa* is a belief. The latter are individual bits of ignorance, while *dogmata* form a collective body that offers a standard for judgment (*krisis*), guiding informed, rational assent. Stoics are not the only ones who have *dogma* to guide them; so, too, do others, such as the Epicureans.¹⁶⁴ Of course, from the Stoic perspective the Epicurean *dogmata* are incorrect, while the Epicureans judge Stoic *dogmata* in the same fashion.

As so often happens a seeming impasse resulted. The philosophers could not agree among themselves.

¹⁶⁴ Epictetus in Arrian, *Discourses*, III.7.8–9. Also see III.7.17.

Yet that did not stop them from actively seeking to win the hearts and minds of others—and doing so with great conviction. No less than the religions of the Hellenistic world, the philosophies of the period promised salvation through peace of mind by virtue of a certainty about the way reality is and how one ought to live in it.

The Spirit of Skepticism

However, the clamoring, competing voices proclaiming certainty—each with its own vision and no two exactly agreeing—did not produce peace of mind for many folk. The Pyrrhonist Skeptic Sextus Empiricus recounts the story of Skepticism as originating in a quest for peace of mind amidst the tumult:

Now the original cause of Skepticism we say to be the hope of attaining tranquility. For very bright people, disturbed by anomalies in the things before them, and unsure as to which of these merit assent, then sought to uncover what in them is true (*alêthes*) and what is false (*pseudo*), so that such a determination would bring about tranquility (*ataraktêsontes*). And so the basic principle since the beginning of Skepticism has been that of opposing to each proposition an equal counterpart; for we think that by doing so we stop any dogmatizing.¹⁶⁵

Sextus' philosophical language, though, is not as vividly clear as we find in the Syrian satirist Lucian of Samosata (125–180 C.E.), who in a dialog titled *Hermotimus*, captures well the essential spirit of Skepticism.¹⁶⁶ In the dialog the character Lycinus, speaking for Lu-

¹⁶⁵ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I.6.12.

¹⁶⁶ Edwards, "Lucian," 202, rightly remarks, "If Lycinus were to make common cause with any school in the *Hermotimus*, he would call himself a sceptic."

cian, encounters his friend Hermotimus, who is a dedicated student of Stoicism. During the course of their discussion Lycinus raises the difficulty he personally has in committing to a particular school of philosophy. He uses the example of wanting to get to Corinth and seeking direction to do so. He points out that when other travelers offer directions that vary from one another he knows not whom to trust. They may each provide good directions, but whether they be to Corinth or to some other city they have mistaken for Corinth is hard to determine. The dilemma is this: only one road leads to Corinth, but which guide knows the correct road?

Hermotimus agrees with him that different roads lead different directions to different destinations.¹⁶⁷ Lycinus then remarks:

Well then, dear Hermotimus, we stand in need of no little amount of counsel in choosing roads and guides. We can hardly act according to the saying, “Wherever our feet lead, there we shall go.” Doing so, we would find ourselves on the road to Babylon or Bactra rather than Corinth and not even know it. We cannot simply trust to good luck that we should stumble on the correct path by starting out in some direction without closer examination of it.¹⁶⁸

The essence of the Skeptic’s task and process is this “closer examination.”

The term “Skeptic,” from σκέψις (*skepsis*), means “examination” (among other things), and those who devote themselves to careful inquiry and deliberative

¹⁶⁷ Lucian, *Hermotimus*, 27. The dialog is also sometimes known by other, more descriptive titles, such as *On Rival Philosophies* or *Concerning Different Sects*.

¹⁶⁸ Lucian, *Hermotimus*, 28.

thought are “Skeptics” (οἱ σκεπτικὸς, *hoi skeptikos*), “those who reflect.” However, the word *skepsis* also acquired the sense of “hesitation,” for those who reflect in the manner of the Skeptics are hesitant to make commitments to the conclusions being drawn by others, and given their penchant for raising questions the word also, inevitably, came to mean “doubt.” Thus, while the original impetus for the way of Skepticism is careful inquiry and examination, the consequence of hesitation makes them popularly perceived as doubters—an association still so large for many that other elements of meaning are often lost.

Today, many people assume that the ancient Skeptics—especially those who called themselves “Pyrrhonists”—proclaimed that knowledge simply cannot be achieved. Such a conclusion is unwarranted.¹⁶⁹ Rather, they set the bar higher than the other schools, and even among themselves they differed in how high the bar should be set to claim knowledge.

Ancient Greek Skepticism broadly divides into two groups: Pyrrhonists and Academicians. The latter group includes members of Plato’s Academy in two of its historical periods, most notably the Academy leaders Arcesilaus of Pitane and Carneades of Cyrene. Among the Pyrrhonists, in addition to Pyrrho of Elis himself, the most noted are Sextus Empiricus and Aenesidemus.

Though these two ways of practicing Skepticism were at odds with one another, and ought not to be regarded as merely variant branches of a single philosophical school, they do share some important com-

¹⁶⁹ On the possibility of knowledge in Skepticism, see Frede, “The Sceptic’s Two Kinds of Assent.”

monalities. For our purposes it is sufficient to name two: their doubt over whether knowledge as true and certain information is possible for one to know that one has it, and their practice of thus suspending judgment because of doubt on the first matter.¹⁷⁰

In practice, the Skeptics—whether Pyrrhonists or Academic philosophers—leave a lopsided perspective, one heavy on the criticism of other philosophies but lean in setting out anything positive themselves.¹⁷¹ This was the case from the beginning. Diogenes Laertius, in writing of the early Skeptic philosophers under Pyrrho, comments, “The Skeptics zealously pursued a course of overthrowing the dogmas of everyone else, but themselves set out no dogmas of their own. They continued presenting those of others, and describing them in detail, without doing the same for themselves.”¹⁷²

But while they formally eschew *dogma*, the central convictions of the different forms of Skepticism are plain enough. We shall begin with the acknowledged founder of philosophical Skepticism as a ‘system.’

Pyrrhonism

¹⁷⁰ Charlotte Stough, *Greek Skepticism*, 4, writes, “It is possible to pick out at least three features common to the Greek skeptical philosophies: first, their practical orientation; second, the denial of knowledge (or certainty); third, the resultant practice of suspending judgment.”

¹⁷¹ I agree with Leo Groarke, *Greek Skepticism*, 79, who remarks, “Scepticism is not, however, entirely negative, and its positive basis for belief is also anticipated by earlier philosophers. It is found in the corollary of the conclusion that humans cannot objectively decide between opposing views—that one must endorse a more subjective way of choosing beliefs.” He lists as examples Xenophanes, Parmenides, Heraclitus, Democritus, and Socrates, among others.

¹⁷² Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Pyrrho*, IX.74 [Pyrrho, IX.8].

Some skeptical thinking by philosophers in epistemology has been around from the start. We might recall the tone in Socrates himself (popularly appealed to by the Skeptics), and there were other thinkers noted for that philosophical bent—including Protagoras and Democritus—long before a formal Skeptic philosophy arose. However, the first expression of philosophical skepticism as a well-articulated and distinctive approach emerged in the 4th century B.C.E. and later became known as Pyrrhonism after the name of its founder.

Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360–275 B.C.E.) is reckoned as the father of Greek Skepticism as a distinct philosophical approach. With Pyrrho and his student Timon of Phlius (c. 315–225 B.C.E.) there developed a more formal and elaborated philosophy of Skepticism.¹⁷³ Pyrrho himself left nothing in the way of writings. Of the writings of Timon, only fragments remain. The most important of these, reports Timon as follows:

But his (Pyrrho's) disciple Timon says one who intends to live happily must look at three matters: first, what things are by nature; second, how we should be disposed toward them; and finally, what results from having such a disposition. He says Pyrrho shows that things are equally without difference, without consistency, and without determination—and therefore neither our sense-perceptions (*aisthēseis*) nor our beliefs (*doxas*) can be shown to be true (*alētheuein*) or to be false (*pseudesthai*). Accordingly, for this very reason we ought not to rely (*pistuein*) on them, but rather to be without belief (*adoxastous*), without inclination, and unmoved, saying about each and every thing that it is no more *is* than *is not*, or is

¹⁷³ This is the line of explanation adopted by Sextus Empiricus in explaining the name 'Pyrrhonism' (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I.3.7.)

both *is* and *is not*, or neither *is* nor *is not*. At any rate, Timon says that those disposed as Pyrrho recommends first will be without speech, but then tranquil (*ataraxia*); but Aenesidemus says pleasure.¹⁷⁴

Here ethics meets metaphysics meets epistemology. It is the same basic quest to understand reality correctly in order to live and live well.

Diogenes Laertius writes,

They set out this kind of precept of interpretation: while things appear (*phainetai*) to be this or that, things *are* in actuality not as they only *appear to be* (*phainesthai*); they said both that they do not seek what one thinks—for thinking is obvious to itself—but that they seek what sense-perceptions (*aisthēseis*) participate in.¹⁷⁵

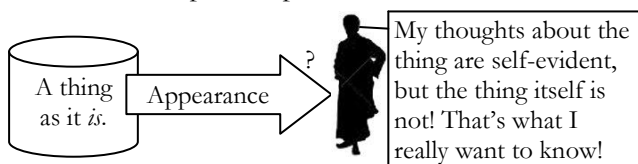
The Skeptic has no doubt about what he or she is *thinking*, but they have plenty of doubts about what sense-perception is reporting about the world. They would like to know the reality of the thing, but that

¹⁷⁴ Timon in Aristocles, *On Philosophy*, VII, quoted in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* (*Praeparatio Evangelica*), XIV.18.2–3. About this text, Clayman, *Timon*, 55, remarks, “Since it is universally agreed that this text represents the very heart of original Pyrrhonism, it has been subjected to the most careful and painstaking analysis which has generated some differences of opinion on how it should be read.” With respect to this, the string of descriptors—*adiaphora*, *astathmēta*, and *anepikrita*—has occasioned much comment with translators often trying to decide based on whether the text should be read in reference to metaphysics or epistemology. The word ἀφασίαν (*aphasian*) in the final sentence is puzzling; it nowhere else is known to attach to Pyrrho and the suggestion has been the word is a copyist error for Aristocles’ original choice ἀπαθίαν (*apathian*), “without passion,” which certainly fits Skeptic thinking and expression. On the matter, see Beckwith, *Greek Buddha*, 210.

¹⁷⁵ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Pyrrho*, IX.77 [*Pyrrho*, IX.8].

reality is much harder to get at than one's thoughts (and subsequent assertions). Yet the search matters because such knowledge guides living. And that leads to the complaint made by the Pyrrhonists about other philosophical approaches: all other philosophies confuse the certainty of their thinking for the certainty of reality. What they proclaim as knowledge is merely their own thinking, about which they are very dogmatic.

For the Skeptic the picture looks like this:



The hang-up is with the “appearance.” Sextus Empiricus (c. 160–210 C.E.) remarks that many are confused on this matter, especially about how Skeptics use the term. He denies the claim that Skeptics have simply done away with the idea. In fact, he says, Skeptics like anyone else are involuntarily impacted by things that impact the senses. What is different about the Skeptics, he argues, is that they do not overvalue that impact and draw wrong conclusions from it. He writes:

[W]e do not set aside the passionate *phantasia* (*phantasian pathetikēn*) that come before us and co-opt our assent unwillingly—and these are ‘appearances’ (*phaenomena*). And when we inquire whether the underlying object is the same as it appears (*phanetai*), we acknowledge that it appears (*phanetai*); but our inquiring is not about the appearance (*phainomenou*), but what is *said* about the appear-

ance (*phainomenou*)—and that is decidedly different from inquiring about the appearance (*phainomenon*) itself.¹⁷⁶

In short, no sensible Skeptic denies something has “appeared,” but any sensible one denies that what is then said about it is necessarily true. It is the underlying truth the Skeptic wants.

Sextus then goes on to argue that the Skeptic acknowledgment of *phainomena* (“appearances”) is evident in their own use of the word “criterion” (*kriterion*).¹⁷⁷ Unlike those who use the word to refer to the rule determining belief (*pistin*) as to whether a thing is real or not, Skeptics use the term to refer to the rule for conduct in life. What he means is that a Skeptic does not pretend to know that an appearance is the way things really are, but in order to live in the here-and-now it is enough to make decisions based on how things *appear to be* when they involuntarily arouse human passions.¹⁷⁸

This might at first blush seem a trivial distinction. But in terms of epistemology it is decisive—and what keeps the Pyrrhonian from being a Protagorean. Unlike

¹⁷⁶ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I.10.19. The phrase “underlying object” translates ὑποκείμενον (*hupokeimenon*, fr. ὑπόκειμαι), often used in philosophy to refer to the underlying essence or object generating sense-impressions. This way of thinking is why Sextus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I.7.13–14, can say, “the Pyrrhonian gives no assent to non-evident things.”

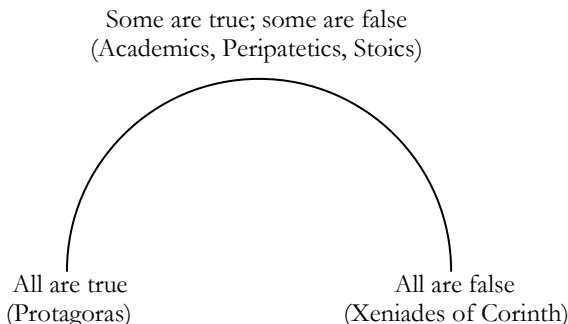
¹⁷⁷ For more on the *kriterion* in Sextus Empiricus, see Brunschwig, *Papers*, 224–43.

¹⁷⁸ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I.11.22: “The criterion (*kriterion*) we have in mind, of those who follow the Skeptic way, is the ‘appearance’ (*phainomenon*)—giving this label to what is called *phantasia*. For since this lies in feeling, and involuntary passion at that, it is beyond questioning. Therefore, no one, I imagine, argues that an underlying object appears this way or that way; the debate is over whether the object *is* such as it *appears to be*.”

Protagoras, who made appearances the criterion of truth *and* living, the Skeptic makes them the criterion only of the latter. The problem with making them the criterion for establishing metaphysical truth is this:

If appearance (*phantasian*) is set as the criterion (*kriterion*), then, we must say as Protagoras did that *every* appearance (*phantasian*) is true (*alethe*), or as Xenias of Corinth said, that all are false (*pseude*), or as the Stoics and Academic philosophers and Aristotle's Peripatetics said, that some are true and some are false. But since, as we shall demonstrate, it cannot be said that every appearance is true, or every false, or some true and some false, thereby appearance cannot be asserted to be a criterion.¹⁷⁹

To use *phantasia* as a criterion is to pick a side among the debaters:



¹⁷⁹ Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos, Against the Logicians*, I.388–390. Also see *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, II.78: “Accordingly, since even if we grant that we ought to judge (*krinein*) external things according to *phantasia*, whether we decide to believe (*pistuein*) all *phantasia*, or only to believe (*pistuein*) some, or to disbelieve (*apistein*) all, with respect to being criteria (*kriterioi*), in any case the argument (*ho logos*) is overthrown, and we are made to conclude *phantasia* are not to be drawn upon as criteria (*kriteria*) for judgment (*krisin*).”

With all positions fixed and unyielding, appearances are unsuitable as a criterion for establishing truth. By contrast the Skeptic's own position is this:



Judge in favor of
sense-perception
(Epicureans)



Suspend
judgment
(Skeptics)



Judge in favor of
reason
(Stoics and others)

The imbalanced judgments of the non-Skeptics, say the Skeptics, generate confusion and mental distress because they dogmatically set out assertions about reality and knowledge that simply cannot be proved true. The best course is to *suspend judgment*.¹⁸⁰

The Pyrrhonist Aenesidemus (c. 100–40 B.C.E.), who most scholars think began as a member of the Academy,¹⁸¹ contrasts the two approaches to Skepticism, beginning with his summary complaint that, “The Academics are dogmatists (*dogmatikoi*) because they set out some matters without hesitation, and deny others without reserve.” On the other hand, he says appro-

¹⁸⁰ See Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I.12.25–27.

¹⁸¹ This conclusion being based on Photius, *List of Books* (*Bibliotheca*, aka *Myriobiblion*), codex 212.169b, where in his report on having read Aenesidemus’ *Arguments* notes the work was dedicated to Lucius Tubero, “one of his colleagues from the Academy” Γράφει δὲ τοὺς λόγους Αἰνησιδῆμος προσφωνῶν αὐτοὺς τῶν ἐξ Ἀκαδημίας τινὶ συναιρεσιώτῃ Λευκίῳ Τοβέρῳ (Γράφει δὲ τοὺς λόγους Αἰνῆσιδῆμος προσφῶν ἄνους τὸν ἐξ Ἀκαδημίας τινὶ συναιρεσιώτῃ Λευκίῳ Τοβερῶν). See Polito, *Aenesidemus*.

vingly, “Pyrrhonists allow themselves to remain puzzled by things and oppose all dogma (*dogmatos*).”¹⁸²

So the Skeptic has a different orientation. Sextus Empiricus puts it this way:

The naturally expected result when looking into any matter is that the ones looking either find something, or deny finding it and confess that it is beyond comprehension (*akatalepsias*), or they keep looking for it. Similarly, when it comes to philosophical investigations, some claim to have found the truth (*alethes*), others that it is beyond grasp, and others are still looking for it.

Those who think they have discovered it are called ‘Dogmatists’ and include the schools who follow Aristotle and Epicurus and the Stoics, and some others. Those who think it beyond the power of comprehension (*katalephthēnai*) include those who follow Clitomachus and Carneades, and some of the other Academic philosophers. The Skeptics are still looking for it.¹⁸³

To avoid expressing dogmatically what they don’t know but are still searching for, the Pyrrhonian is careful in speech. Instead, they soon became well-known for repeating pithy statements like these:

- “Not one thing do we determine.”
- “Every assertion has a corresponding assertion set against it.”
- “Not one thing is more suited to adopt than another.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Photius, *List of Books*, 212.169b.

¹⁸³ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I.1.1–3.

¹⁸⁴ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Pyrrho*, IX.74–75 [*Pyrrho*, IX.8]. The three sayings in Greek are: [1] Οὐδὲν ὀρίζομεν (*Ouden horizomen*). [2] Παντὶ λόγῳ λόγος ἀντίκειται. (*Panti logō logos anti-keitai*.) [3] Οὐδὲν μᾶλλον καὶ θετικῶς (*Ouden mallon kai thetikōs*.)

Such sayings express the basic pillars of the Pyrrhonian Skeptic:

1. Avoid dogmatism.
2. Balance one assertion by another.
3. Suspend judgment.

In a rather long-winded, tedious manner Aenesidemus manages to make these points rhetorically powerful:

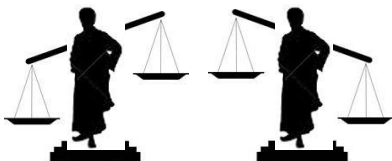
And none of the Pyrrhonists have absolutely declared that all things are incomprehensible (*akatalēpta*) or comprehensible (*katalēpta*), but rather that they are not more this than that, or that on the one hand they are this and on the other not this, or that for this person they are this but not for another person, and for someone else they do not exist at all! Nor do any of the Pyrrhonists maintain that in general all things, or some of them, are easily accessible to us, or that they are not easily accessible, but rather that no things are more accessible to us than inaccessible, or that on the one hand they are accessible and on the other hand inaccessible, or that for this person they are accessible but for another inaccessible. Indeed, Pyrrhonists do not say that anything is either true (*alēthinon*) or false (*pseudos*), persuasive (*pithanon*) or not persuasive (*apithanon*), *is* or *is not*, but that the same thing could be said to be no more true (*alēthes*) than false (*pseudos*), persuasive (*pithanon*) than not persuasive (*apithanon*), *is* than *is not*, or on the one hand this and on the other hand that, or this for one person and not this for another.¹⁸⁵

All of these ideas we have examined can be put together in a modification of an earlier illustration.

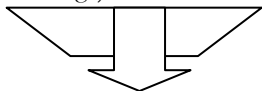
¹⁸⁵ Photius, *List of Books*, 212.169–170. For an alternate translation, see Sedley and Long, *Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1, 469.

Dogmatists

¹The common (or majority, or even expert) belief weighs any given decision on an appearance in one direction only. It is imbalanced, but



accompanied by strong feeling (*pathè*), which lends conviction (belief, not real knowledge).



²Seeing this situation, the Skeptic recognizes that for every such belief conviction (*pistis*) there is a contrary belief or disbelief (*apistis*).

⁴At the same time, the Skeptic accepts being guided by the appearance at hand (the criterion for action), taking it at face value, as it *seems* in the moment, but without any investment of feeling or dogmatic belief about what it says about what *is*. Thus the Skeptic remains unperturbed.

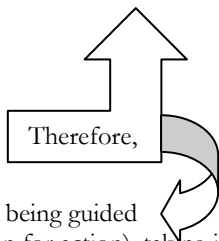
Tranquility (*ataraxia*) includes an absence of strong feelings (*pathè*) and Sextus associates this with the Skeptic practice of reporting what seems to him or her to be true, but doing so “without belief” (*adoxastōs*), in the sense of ‘without persuasion.’¹⁸⁶ For the Pyrrhonian

Skeptics

³The scales are balanced by the Skeptic (*isosthenia*) in a suspension of



judgment (*epochè*), which leads to desired tranquility (*ataraxia*)



¹⁸⁶ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I.7.15: “But most importantly, in the offering of his slogans he is speaking of the appear-

Skeptic the only permissible belief is the common, ordinary, trivial belief of what seems to be true in the moment, such as “I believe I am cold.”

The Skepticism of the Middle Academy

Pyrrhonian Sceptics share some basic notions with their skeptical colleagues in the Academy. Yet in the perspective of someone like Sextus Empiricus there is a world of difference between the older brand of Academic Skepticism and that prevailing in his own day. He has no substantive quarrel with the former but disdains the latter. To understand this distinction we must examine these two periods in the Academy.

Arcesilaus

Plato's school of philosophy has a history that has been divided into three periods. The first, the ‘Old Academy,’ is the school as founded and led by Plato. The other two periods have come to be known as the ‘Middle Academy’ and the ‘New Academy,’ both associated with Skepticism. Arcesilaus of Pitane (c. 316–c.241 B.C.E.), was the *Scholararch* (“Head Scholar”) who first led the Academy into a focus on critiquing the po-

ances (*phainomenon*) as they are to himself and announcing their emotional affect on himself without belief (*adoxastōs*), thereby avoiding any strong affirmations concerning things as they really are.” Terence Irwin argues, “The Sceptics agree with their dogmatic opponents that belief (*doxa*) is to be understood as a normative state; we form a belief by an attempted assessment of the evidence, and if we change our view about the evidence, we change our belief. Sceptics agree that dogmatists have beliefs, since their view of the world relies on rational assessment of the evidence. The dogmatists are wrong, however, to suppose that they rationally assess the evidence. Since Sceptics see the dogmatists’ error, they give up forming beliefs.” See Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, 105.

sitions of other philosophical schools and initiated the changes later known as the ‘Middle’ Academy.¹⁸⁷

Arcesilaus left no writings¹⁸⁸ and his actual teaching is accordingly subject to the transmission and interpretation of others. The Epicurean philosopher Philodemus of Gadara (c. 110–c. 30 B.C.E.), in his brief biographical remarks on the Academic philosophers, says of Arcesilaus that, “he took up no dogmas nor was convinced of anything.”¹⁸⁹

Diogenes Laertius credits Arcesilaus with being the first to formally practice a “withholding” (*epischōn*) of judgment because of the contradictions found in the assertions of opposing arguments. He also credits Arcesilaus with modifying the dialectical process so famously associated with the Academy. Under his leadership both sides of a question are argued, and the question-and-answer method is employed especially so as to critique other positions.¹⁹⁰ Arcesilaus is said by some

¹⁸⁷ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Arcesilaus*, IV.28 [*Arcesilaus*, 2]: “with him is the commencement of the Middle Academy.”

¹⁸⁸ However, the Epicurean writer Philodemus, *Lives of Academic Philosophers* [= Mekler, *Index*, column XX, lines 43–44], says that Arcesilaus’ student Pythodorus recorded his discussions.

¹⁸⁹ Philodemus, *Lives of Academic Philosophers* [= Mekler, *Index*, column XVIII, line 40– col. XIX, line 7].

¹⁹⁰ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Arcesilaus*, IV.28 [*Arcesilaus*, 2]. With respect to the first point: *πρῶτος ἐπισχὼν τὰς ἀποφάσεις διὰ τὰς ἐναντιότητας τῶν λόγων*. (*prōtos epischōn tas apophaseis dia tas enantiotētas tōn logōn*). The *ἐπισχὼν τὰς ἀποφάσεις* may be compared to the *ἐποχή* (*epochē*) of Sextus Empiricus’ Pyrrhonian Skeptics. Diogenes (IV.32) remarks that some believe Arcesilaus refrained from writing anything down as one consequence of his practice of withholding judgment. Cf. Philodemus, *Lives of Academic Philosophers*, XX.1–4. Also see Cicero, *On the Orator*, III.67 [ch. 19], who charac-

philosophers, including his contemporary, Pyrrho's student Timon, to have been influenced by Pyrrho.¹⁹¹

Arcesilaus' basic stance might be pictured this way:



Arguments *pro*

Arguments *con*

The arguments balance;
withhold judgment.

Arcesilaus is also the first to articulate the notion that it is possible to *not* believe (*nihil opinari*)—and essential to not do so in order to be wise.¹⁹² According to Plutarch, this comes about because Arcesilaus envisions the *psyche* as regularly experiencing three movements. The first is the involuntary movement occasioned by sense-perception. The second is an internal impulse aroused by this sense-perception that generates goal-directed behavior. The third movement is the formation of belief. This last movement can be avoided. Thus

terizes him as having rejected judgments of both the senses and intellect (*aspernatum esse omne animi sensusque iudicium*), and of following the Socratic practice of disputing the positive propositions of others (*primumque instituisse—quamquam id fuit Socraticum maxime—non quid ipse sentiret ostendere, sed contra id, quod quisque se sentire dixisset, disputare*). Cf. III.80 [ch. 21].

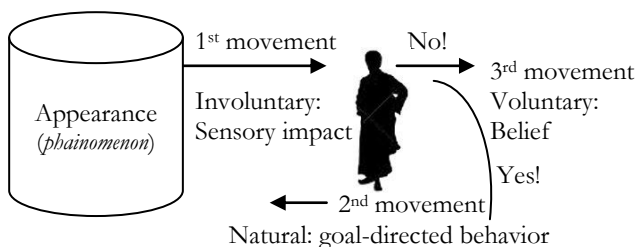
¹⁹¹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Arcesilaus*, IV.32–33 [*Arcesilaus*, 9].

¹⁹² Cicero, *Academics*, II.77 [ch. XXIV]: *Nemo, inquam, superiorum non modo expresserat, sed ne dixerat quidem posse hominem nihil opinari, nec solum posse, sed ita necesse esse sapient: “No one, I say, before him expressed things this way—that is possible for a person not to believe, and not only possible, but necessary to be wise.”*

a person can act in a reasonable, natural fashion by following an internal impulse in the direction of an ethical goal.¹⁹³ On the decisive second movement, Plutarch writes of Arcesilaus' position as follows:

Now the impulse awakened by the appearance (*phantastikon*) sets a person in motion toward a suitable goal, acting like a weight tipping the scale and inclining us to act. So, quite clearly, this impulse is not shut out by those who withhold judgment on all things. Rather, they follow this impulse which in a natural manner leads them to what is suitable in response to the appearance (*phainomenon*).¹⁹⁴

All of this can be pictured as follows:



Only the first movement is beyond the individual's control. The person can choose to exercise belief, but the Skeptic is opposed to doing such. Instead, they advocate a "natural" acting in suitable (i.e., appropriate) accord with the impulse aroused by sense-perception. It is not too difficult to see how Arcesilaus' position on belief is like the Pyrrhonist notion that one can—and should—"without either much partiality or strong feel-

¹⁹³ Plutarch, *Moralia: Reply to Colotes*, 1122b–c.

¹⁹⁴ Plutarch, *Moralia: Reply to Colotes*, 1122c.

ing, simply to follow”¹⁹⁵ what sensation provides as a way of being persuaded without being dogmatic.

New Academy Skepticism

Carneades of Cyrene (214–129 B.C.E.), sometime before 155 B.C.E., became *Scholarch* of the Academy. Carneades set out vigorously to contest the Stoic position developed by Chrysippus, the noted Stoic defender against Arcesilaus’ criticisms. In so doing Carneades became well-known as perhaps Stoicism’s chief critic.¹⁹⁶ Carneades continued pursuing the path established by Arcesilaus, but with some important modifications.¹⁹⁷ The changes under Carneades’ leadership brought about the designation ‘New Academy’ by scholars to distinguish this later approach from the ‘Old Academy’ of Plato and the ‘Middle Academy’ of Arcesilaus.¹⁹⁸

Carneades’ examination of Stoic epistemology led him to conclude that *no* ‘appearance (*phantasia*) is truly a *katalēpsis*—“self-evident.” Cicero, depending on Clitomachus, reports, “Carneades believes there are two ways to classify appearances, one way dividing them

¹⁹⁵ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I.33.229–230.

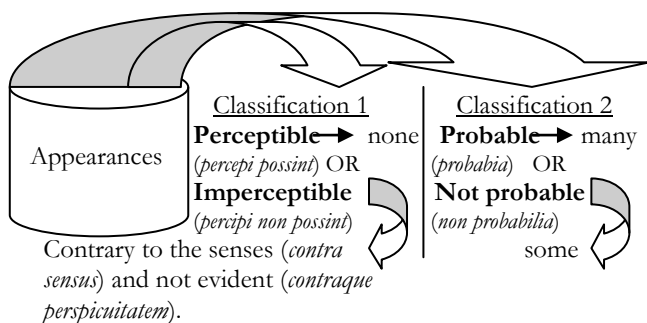
¹⁹⁶ Famously, Carneades is said to have wondered aloud where he would have been had it not been for having Chrysippus as a foil. See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Carneades*, IV.62 [*Carneades*, 2]. See Allen, “Academic Probabilism and Stoic Epistemology” for Carneades vs. the Stoics.

¹⁹⁷ See Numenius, *On the Dissension of the Academics from Plato*, in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, XIV.7.15, who notes the similarity in method but modification of basic principles. For a comparison focused around their critiques of the Stoics, see Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy*, III, 335–339 (esp. 338–339).

¹⁹⁸ But note Cicero, *Academics*, I.46 [ch. XII], where it is argued that the ‘New’ Academy is like the ‘Old’ and that Carneades was a faithful follower of Arcesilaus.

into those that can be perceived and those we cannot perceive, and the other way distinguishing those that are probable from those that are not.”¹⁹⁹ Obviously, most attention must be directed to what we can perceive in order to judge whether they are likely true or not. With respect to this latter group, “those that can be perceived,” Carneades has in mind the self-evident perceptions touted by the Stoics.

We can draw out Carneades’ view on appearances like this:



The first classification system leads to an all-or-nothing result; the second yields a good number of “appearances” (*visorum*) that are probably true.

Carneades’ conclusion that no appearance is self-evident also means no proposition concerning perception can be *certain* to be true. However, that does not mean that such propositions must be false. Instead, starting from the idea that a statement is neither neces-

¹⁹⁹ Cicero, *Academics*, II.99 [ch. XXXI]. Cf. II.111 [ch. XXXIV]. The Latin *visorum*—“appearances”—embraces both things of sense-perception and mental images.

sarily true (i.e., ‘self-evident’) nor necessarily false, the goal is to discern which are more *probably* true. This leads him to set forth a criterion for truth designed to distinguish propositions that are more likely to be true from those less likely to be so.²⁰⁰ This more modest position is why Pyrrhonians accuse New Academy philosophers of being dogmatists.

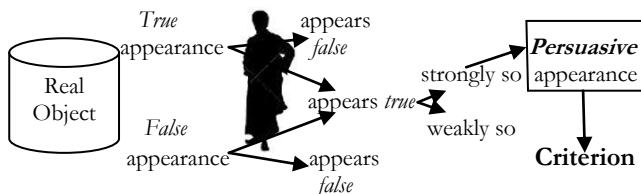
Carneades, according to Sextus Empiricus, develops a notion that a “probably true” *phantasia* is a “persuasive appearance” (*pitthanēn phantasian*). Carneades distinguishes between the appearance (*phantasia*) arising from an external object and the appearance in the person. This means there is a double aspect—or two states—for a *phantasia*. One is objective (i.e., relating to the external object) and the other is subjective (i.e., relating to the person’s internal state). With respect to the first state, arising from the object, if the appearance agrees with the object it is true; otherwise it is a false appearance. With respect to the second state, arising within the person, if the appearance persuades that it is true, this ‘emphasis’ is a ‘persuasion’ and thus a ‘persuasive appearance.’²⁰¹

Carneades, Sextus continues, elaborates the nature of such apparently true appearances. Some are not as clear; their obscurity may be due to something applica-

²⁰⁰ On Carneades’ “probable impressions” (probabilism), see Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I.227–230; also *Adversus Mathematicos*, *Against the Logicians*, I.166–189.

²⁰¹ Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos*, *Against the Logicians*, I.166–169. “Persuasive appearance” is *πιθανήν φαντασίαν* (*pitthanēn phantasian*). The ‘apparently true’ is termed *ἐμφασις* (*emphasis*), “emphasis,” a term used frequently in Greek with references to appearances.

ble to the object itself, such as its size (e.g., very small), or distance (e.g., far away), but it may also be due to something in the observer, such as some sensory defect. Others are not merely apparently true but strongly so. Only the latter constitute a criterion for Carneades.²⁰² We can illustrate this as follows:



Note that an objectively false appearance can appear subjectively true, and if strong, be a persuasive appearance. This situation is why Carneades is only willing to speak of what is *probably* true. Knowledge requires certainty, and that is lacking because there remains the possibility that the observer has incorrectly been persuaded. The summation of the matter is thus: “Therefore the criterion (*kritērion*) is ‘the apparently true appearance’ (*phainomenē alēthēs phantasia*), which the Academic philosophers term ‘persuasive’ (*pithanēn*).”²⁰³

Sextus writes that Carneades then must add a second criterion because appearances are complex. The first criterion is probability; the second is “continuity”²⁰⁴—i.e., a *phantasia* continues to appear as probable.

²⁰² Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos*, *Against the Logicians*, I.171–174. “Apparently true” here translates *φαινομένης ἀληθοῦς* (*phainomenēs alēthous*).

²⁰³ Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos*, *Against the Logicians*, I.174.

²⁰⁴ The Greek word is *ἀπερίσπαστος* (*aperispastos*)—something that continues without interruption.

So, for example, the appearance of another person includes various physical characteristics and habits of presentation such as dress, gait while walking, and so forth. To these are added the environmental factors at hand, both physical (time of day, weather, etc.), and social (groups present, etc.). *If* everything is congruent so that no factor strikes one as false but instead everything appears correct, *then* belief is strengthened.²⁰⁵ Accordingly, “an Academic philosopher makes a judgment (*kerisin*) of the truth (*alētheias*) by the converging of appearances (*phantasiōn*), and when no one of these converging appearances turns him aside as false, he says that it strikes him as true (*alēthes*).”²⁰⁶

Finally, a third criterion is added: a “regularizing” of an appearance by its having been “tested thoroughly.”²⁰⁷ This means, Sextus soon clarifies, that each and every part of the appearance being judged is tested—closely examined—much like candidates for a judgeship are before being deemed fit for office.²⁰⁸ This third criterion is the most decisive in Carneades’ position. But even with all three criteria harmoniously converging to

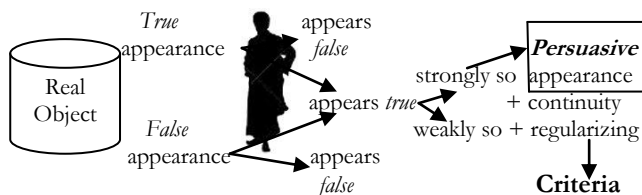
²⁰⁵ Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos, Against the Logicians*, I.177–178. The Greek is ἀλλὰ πᾶσαι συμφώνως φαίνονται ἀληθεῖς, μᾶλλον πιστεύομεν (*alla pasai symphōnōs phainōntai alētheis, mallon pisteuomen*): “But when all harmoniously appear true, then there is greater belief (or trust).”

²⁰⁶ Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos, Against the Logicians*, I.179.

²⁰⁷ The Greek term is διεξωδευμένην (*diexōdeumenēn*, fr. διεξοδεύω), “tested thoroughly” or “regularized,” i.e., officially or correctly established. See Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos, Against the Logicians*, I.166.

²⁰⁸ Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos, Against the Logicians*, I.181–183.

render a persuasive appearance probably true, the judgment remains an assertion of *belief* rather than one of *knowledge*.



Epistemologically, Carneades' criteria support probabilistic belief, that is, the persuasion that undergirds a position that something is more-likely-than-not true.

Cicero, who in the late Roman Republic identified with Carneades' New Academy, summarizes attractively its appeal for himself and many others:

Though all knowledge (*cognitio*) is obstructed by many difficulties—in things themselves there is darkness, and there is weakness in our own judgments (*indiciis*)—such that it is not without reason that the most venerable and learned of folk have found themselves distrusting their ability to discover what they long for, yet neither did they grow weak, nor will our zeal to keep searching be abandoned from fatigue, nor are our discussions driven by any other end than that by our asserting (*dicendo*) each side to coax out and express something that either is true (*verum*) or may come closest to it.²⁰⁹

The Skeptic task is a daunting one. While some degree of Skepticism remains a feature of good, rational thinking, the degree to which a Pyrrhonist insists has generally been resisted. This is not a philosophical path for the faint-hearted or the lazy.

²⁰⁹ Cicero, *Academics*, II.7 (end) [ch. III].

Chapter 8

Christian Thinkers on Revelation & Authority

We have patiently considered questions about the nature of knowledge and whether, given that nature, it can be achieved by human beings. Intrinsic to both matters is another that has been there at all times but to which we now will give more complete attention: *how* is knowledge to be achieved, if it can be? If knowledge can be agreed upon to be a matter of achieving sufficient information, coupled with understanding, to grasp the nature of reality, then how does such occur? As we have seen, most answers divide along two lines: sense-perception and/or reason.

In the ancient world the dogmatists largely won the day, whichever path they took. The questions, doubts, and criticisms of the Skeptics were set aside for a prolonged period, though they never entirely vanished. Philosophical schools continued to exist as first Hellenism and then Roman might waxed and waned, but increasingly these schools showed less vigor and rather than advancing striking and provocative new positions instead showed a tendency to repeat earlier and now tired arguments. At the same time, the startling diversity of religions seen in the Hellenistic age slowly became swallowed up by the triumph of Christianity, a victory aided in no small measure by the fatigue of competing systems of thought both religious and philosophical.

Our previous chapters cover a long conversation—a series of debates—continued over some seven centuries, from the 5th century B.C.E. into the 2nd century C.E. The difference between the periods of history we today term “Before the Common Era” (B.C.E.) and the “Common Era” (C.E.) is, of course, Christianity. While its entrance in the 1st century C.E. went little noticed by the world at large, by the end of the 4th century it had achieved such power that it was not merely State-sanctioned but first in rank among the forces vying for the hearts and minds of Western people.

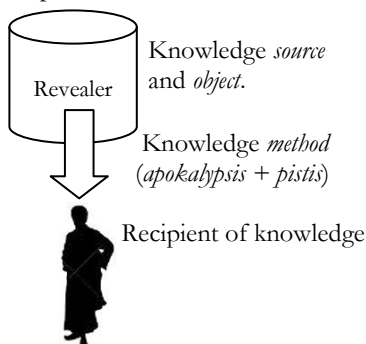
Paul, Authority & Revelation

Though the religion’s namesake is Jesus, called the ‘Christ’ or Messiah, Christianity’s intellectual agenda was principally set by a different Jew—Saul of Tarsus, better known as Paul the Apostle. His interest in showing continuity between the ‘New’ Testament of the Christian Gospel and the ‘Old’ Testament of the Hebrew Scriptures lead him to stress the concept of revelation. To be sure, Paul is not the first to seek epistemological justification in an appeal to revelation, but his task is made critical by Jesus’ place as the confessed savior of humanity who discloses the one true God. If Jesus is the Christ, the revelation of God that brings salvation, what does that mean? Paul’s answer, sketched out across various letters, argues that revelation is not a matter open purely to reason and sensory evidence; it requires “belief” or “faith” (*pistis*). In this manner Christian “knowledge” becomes something different. But what, exactly, does all this mean?²¹⁰

²¹⁰ For more detail on the concept of revelation as developed by Paul, see Bolich, *Honest Belief*, 146–71.

Paul uses a Greek term, ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalypsis*), “revelation,” which has a root sense of “to uncover.” It is a word often attached to mysteries such as those central to the Hellenistic expressions known as the ‘mystery religions.’ In his cultural context, whatever new meaning Paul might add, his audience starts with a familiar term and they understand its basic sense.

It is an idea about disclosure, a making known what matters. In short, the idea of revelation easily brings together metaphysics with its concern for what is real, with epistemology. That revelation is genuinely a ‘way to know’ can be pictured as follows:

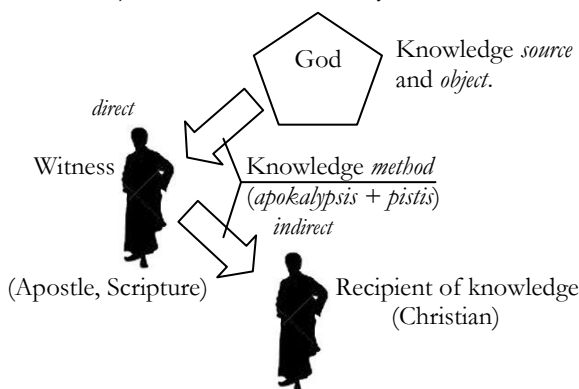


At the heart of revelation is a *relationship between source and object*. The relational aspect is conveyed by remembering the source and object are the same—God in Paul’s presentation—and by a method that makes *pistis* the key to *apokalypsis*.

The special appeal of the concept of revelation lies in its promise to disclose things not ordinarily available through established means of knowing such as sense-perception and reason. In other words, where Greek epistemology developed along lines focused on what

human beings exercising their native abilities can achieve, *the idea of revelation begins with a presumption of the insufficiency of human abilities and efforts.*

When involving persons, most notably deity, revelation can be *about* the other (i.e., disclosed through a witness), or directly *of* and *by* the other (i.e., self-disclosure). We must thus modify our earlier drawing:



In establishing apostolic authority, direct revelation is fundamental. But the apostle then becomes a witness to others (just as Christ and Scripture were witnesses to the apostle). Whether directly (unmediated) or indirectly, revelation remains an intrinsically two-sided matter, depending both on a disclosure and an audience receiving it. The former aspect is problematic enough, but the latter is the one where epistemology always has staked its principal interest.

How does an audience receive any revelation? We saw with Parmenides that the divine disclosure granted to him is a matter open to reason. Heraclitus seems to eschew divine revelation but finds in *Logos* the key to discerning the self-disclosing nature of the world, and

that principally through sense-perception. Characteristic of Greek philosophy is a focus on human abilities as the locus of “knowing.” There persists a confidence in the human audience to achieve knowledge through ordinary means even if needing prompting and help from extraordinary sources such as a deity.

The Jewish roots of the Christian idea of revelation, however, stress the distance between God in divine transcendence and humanity. Thereby a greater dependence on God’s efforts is required. The fundamental ‘otherness’ of God means, as the Hebrew Scriptures proclaim, that no one can see God and live.²¹¹ The Hebrew God remains one hidden even when disclosed, an idea that can lead to envisioning God as a being with emanations (e.g., God’s *Shekinah* conveys the divine immanence among people),²¹² or as one still hidden though revealed in Christ.²¹³ Coupled with the idea that God is one who acts in history in decisive

²¹¹ Exodus 33:20. Cf. John 1:18 in the Christian New Testament.

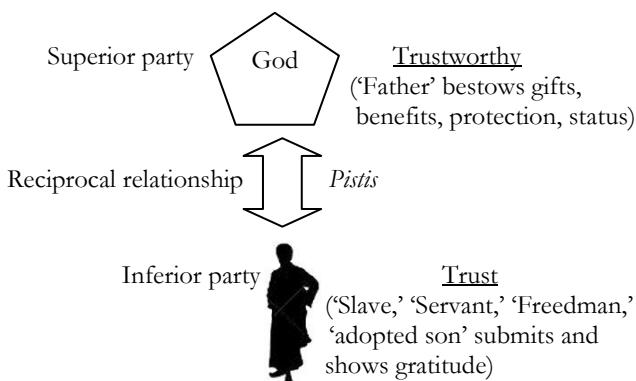
²¹² This notion of the *Shekinah* (or *Shechinah*; Heb. שכינה) emerges on the Jewish side in Kabbalism, in the *sefirot* (emanations from God), of which the *Shekinah* is the 10th and closest to God’s creation. But the term itself has roots in Rabbinic Judaism; see in the Talmud, for example, *Sanhedrin* 39a (the *Shekinah* rests upon every gathering of a *minyan* (the required minimum of 10 adult Jews) for prayer), or *Megillah* 29a (the *Shekinah* accompanies the Jews in exile), and in the Targums in Pseudo-Jonathan to Exodus 6:3, which has God declaring that the revelation to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was only by the presence of the *Shekinah*. The term is common in the Targums (Aramaic periphrastic translations of the Hebrew Scriptures). For a brief introduction to the word and its use in the Targums see McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, 36–37.

²¹³ As in the *Deus revelatus*, *Deus absconditus* of Martin Luther (e.g., *Bondage of the Will*, LXIV). For a brief review of the matter, see Bolic, *Chasing the Ghost*, 251–54.

manner, the Christian challenge undertaken by Paul was to apply these notions to the figure of Christ.

Paul's solution—developed in such a manner as to still provoke heated debates among Christians more than two millennia later—seizes upon the use of *pistis*. We already have seen the word utilized in an epistemological context where it can be joined with *doxa* and is employed to modify in one or another fashion what it means to 'take up a position.' Because *pistis* invokes ideas of trust, confidence, and persuasion, it is ideal for a religion placing at its center a relationship with God through Christ.

Paul's social reality in a world defined by reciprocity in relationships (e.g., patronage) situates *pistis* as entailing privileges and responsibilities on both sides:



How *pistis* is understood is dependent not only on the specific kind of relationship (e.g., patron to client, master to slave, teacher to disciple, husband to wife), but also on from which side the relationship is examined. Thus *pistis* for the superior party is not exactly the same as for the inferior party, even though the same

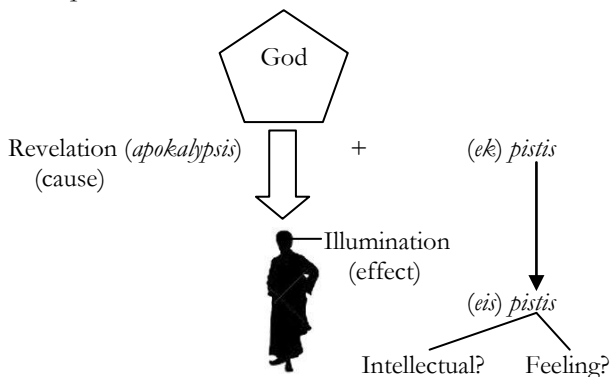
core concept exists for both. For example, the inferior party exhibits trust in a superior party presumed to be trustworthy; the inferior party expresses gratitude and submission while the superior party offers protection and benefits.²¹⁴

Paul and other authors of the New Testament rely on relational terms. Christians are depicted variously as slaves, servants, and children. In the Roman world this means the knowledge of one another is familial, within a household governed by firm expectations. The use of *pistis*, itself inherently relational, is ideal for invoking a strongly relational sense to knowledge. But it also runs the risk of becoming too one-sidedly subjective. So Paul and other Christian thinkers need to find ways to preserve the relational nature of knowledge without letting it slip into so much subjectivity it risks either Protagoras' relativism or pure solipsism.

By invoking *pistis* as the key to understanding revelation, Paul opens up intriguing possibilities with respect to understanding knowledge because revelation grounds *pistis* in something outside the knower. It thus provides an objective anchor to hold in proper place the subjective ship. Revelation—as far as the audience is concerned—is something noted by its *effect* or *result*, an illumination that leaves the recipient in an enlightened state. But employing *pistis* as the vehicle by which revelation is received leaves open the question whether the resulting state of enlightenment is principally intellectual—a rational assent to a persuasive presentation, in philosophical terms—or something else. While *pistis*

²¹⁴ See Heen, “Pistis,” 728. Also see Whitlark, *Enabling Fidelity to God*, 25–36.

might be understood along Aristotelian lines, where persuasion and *logos* are important, the relational character of *pistis* might instead be understood to prioritize trust and a commitment of the will based on a movement of feeling (*pathe*). Of course, all these elements and more can be involved. As Paul expresses in Romans 1:17, revelation (of God's righteousness) links *pistis* to *pistis*.²¹⁵ We can illustrate this as follows:



To solve the mystery of what Paul means requires more than focusing on either the term *apokalypsis* or *pistis* and instead seeing them in relation to one another. With respect to the former word, the idea of an ‘apocalyptic sensibility’ in the ancient world has become a common way within which to frame Paul’s use of *pistis*. In this approach, the sense is that Paul envisions the manifestation of God-in-Christ as the decisive turning point in history. It means nothing can be looked at it in the same way as before. In a certain sense, history has

²¹⁵ On this text, see Bolich, *Honest Belief*, 161–66. Greek: ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν (*ek pisteōs eis pistin*).

ended, a new age begun, and whatever pertained to what existed before must be set aside. Thus, neither sense-perception nor reason can be depended upon any longer to know the nature of the reality that matters.

But *pistis* enters in an ambiguous manner in one important respect. Paul leaves unclear whether the primary referent of *pistis* is faith *in* Jesus or the faith *of* Jesus. We cannot know—will *never* know—whether Paul intended the ambiguity that exists. We do know the effect his use of *pistis* in relation to revelation soon had. The Christian path and claim to knowledge would no longer rest principally on either sense-perception or reason, but on revelation and relationship.

One immediate consequence was felt in Paul's own lifetime. He appeals to revelation and his own *pistis* in substantiating his claims and supporting his role as an authoritative apostle. In Paul's writings we see how often the notion of revelation surfaces in autobiographical material. These are most marked in Galatians. At the start of the letter (1:12, 16) he refers back to his personal experience of Christ's self-revelation. This is followed by a justification of his journey to Jerusalem as "by revelation" (2:2). In 2 Corinthians, Paul appeals to "visions and revelations of the Lord" (12:1), and their consequence (12:7). In Philippians the idea is used in support of his authority (3:15). In 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 Paul reminds readers of his core message and its legitimacy. In support he names three elements: first, the authority of the common tradition he also had received (15:3); second, the authority of the scriptures on which it rests (15:4); and finally, the authority of a direct revelation of Christ, which he also had received (15:8). In such manner Paul not only secures his imme-

diate position as an authoritative witness, but also gives grounds to adopt his writings as Scripture.²¹⁶

Revelation and *pistis* together provide *authority*. Subsequent generations of Christians would hitch their wagons to this team. They would thus create an epistemology with both subjective and objective elements. Subjectively, knowledge is personal and relational, *pistis* being trust in the trustworthy. Objectively, knowledge is disclosed information existing independently of the receiver and capable of being set down propositionally so that *pistis* becomes demonstration of truth in Christian doctrine and dogma. At various times in history one pole or the other has ascended to prominence. Achieving and retaining a balance has proved elusive. In either event, *pistis* becomes the decisive human element in knowledge.

Revelation & Authority in the Church Fathers

We find such ideas in the Church Fathers of the first four centuries. In the late 2nd century an otherwise unknown Christian writer, styling himself simply as a “disciple” (*Mathetes*), sends a letter to an equally unknown man named Diognetus. In it the author modestly claims for Christians, “Nor are they inventive or overly inquisitive in the things they take thought about, nor are they proponents of any human doctrine, like some folk are.”²¹⁷

²¹⁶ See Bolich, *Honest Belief*, 176–78.

²¹⁷ *Epistle to Diognetus*, V.3. The key Greek phrase for us is οὐδὲ δόγματος ἀνθρώπινου προεστᾶσιν (*oude dogmatos anthrōpinou proestasin*). The *dogmatos anthrōpinou*—human *dogma*—is in contrast to the μάθημα (*mathēma*), “doctrine” or “teaching” held by the Christians. The word *proestasin* (fr. προϊστημι), suggests the leading, or ‘ruling’ *dogmata* among people, but the exact meaning here remains uncer-

This modesty reflects the sensibility of one who depends on a superior to disclose what is needed and who accepts it without too much question because he or she trusts in its trustworthiness. One commentator on this text rightly remarks that the author's sense is that "Christian truth ('no human doctrine') is not discovered so much as disclosed (iv, 6; v, 3; vii, 1 f.), and that to faith (viii, 6)."²¹⁸ Revelation establishes authority; searching for knowledge is replaced by a confidence that knowledge is a safely preserved repository.

The epistemological process changes from an earnest *searching* using sense-perception and reason to *passive dependence* on an externally originated disclosure. The activity of the Christian is not to *find* knowledge but to *accept* it. The role of the Christian is as a *believer*, one who accepts by trust what has been delivered and then securely passes it on.²¹⁹ The sentiment is not to engage in clever thinking—or indeed to presumptuously think too much at all!—but instead trust in "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."²²⁰

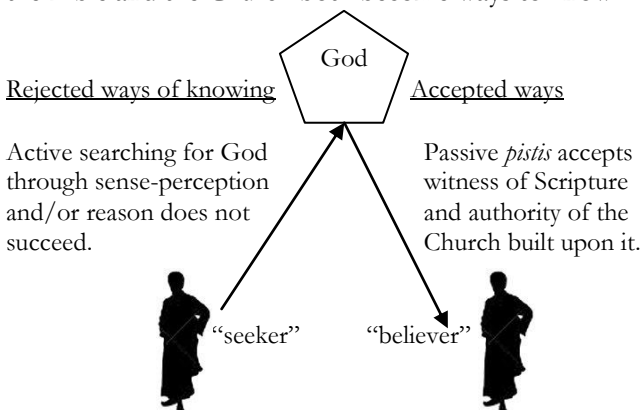
tain. Also of note, the term πολυπραγμόνων (*polupragmonōn*), translated here as "overly inquisitive" is a pejorative one, used of tiresome, meddlesome busybodies.

²¹⁸ Meecham, *Epistle to Diognetus*, 44. Jefford, *Epistle to Diognetus*, 220, writes, "The Christian's understanding of life is not formulated on 'human doctrine' (δόγματος ἀνθρωπίνου) that derives from careful reflection and rumination."

²¹⁹ The idea is well-expressed by Augustine, *Sermo de Symbolo ad Catechumenos* (*Sermon on the Creed to Catechumens*), 1[1], where he says with reference to the creedal rule of faith, "what you are about to hear you are to believe (*creditori*), and what you shall have believed (*credideritis*) you are to return by your confession." Latin: *Quod audituri estis, hoc creditori, et quod credideritis, hoc etiam lingua redditori*.

²²⁰ Jude 1:3. Greek: τῇ ἅπαξ παραδοθείσῃ τοῖς ἁγίοις πίστει. (*tē hapax paradotheisē tois hagiois pistei*.)

We can easily picture how this idea of revelation as the highest authority then conveys authority to others; the Bible and the Church both become ways to know.



Revelation creates a hierarchy of authorities.

A principal and practical way that revelation through witnesses like Scripture and Church provides a temporal authority is in governing Christian living. Like the philosophies still circulating in the Roman world, Christianity embraces the idea that epistemology cannot be severed from ethics. Knowledge produces behavior. Thus, for example, Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35–c. 110) connects *pistis* with love—a connection that will prove enduring and significant in Christian theology, and one echoed by other writers of the period.²²¹

²²¹ Ignatius, *Epistle to the Philadelphians*, IX.2: πάντα ὁμοῦ καλὰ ἐστίν, ἐὰν ἐν ἀγάπῃ πιστεύητε. (*panta homou kala estin, ean en agapē pisteuēte*.) Also see the *Epistle to the Smyrneans*, VI.1; XIII.2; cf. *Epistle to Polycarp*, VI.2. Faith, hope and love are mentioned together in the letter to the Philadelphians (XI.2); cf. *Epistle of Barnabas*, I.4, XI.8. A con-

In the 2nd–3rd centuries the relational nature of *pistis* is yoked in a subordinate role to an objectification of revelation by the determination of a Christian canon for an authoritative Bible. Alongside it are those doctrines that must serve as authoritative dogma. Said a bit differently, Paul’s appeal to a direct and personal experience of revelation at an individual level is deemphasized in favor of an appeal to the communal experience of revelation through Scripture, Church and Creed. It is easy to understand this emphasis in an age of anxiety because of competing claims of being the true Christian way. Against competitors like Marcion and the Gnostics, a Christian orthodoxy, a “right path,” must emerge.²²² Its course and boundaries are marked by the “rule of faith” (*regula fidei*), a statement of belief to be accepted and confessed.²²³

A ‘one’ Church, and that a ‘catholic’ Church, offers strength, stability, and a sense of belonging to something not only greater than oneself, but secure in the blessings and promises of God. In short, that means a united Church must also be the true Church—unity and truth coexist in a common confession built upon the foundational big ideas about *pistis*.²²⁴ The notion of experiences of direct encounters with God diminish, though they are preserved in a sense of the abiding presence of God’s Holy Spirit through Church and Scripture. Faith comes by *hearing* the gospel, not by *see-*

nection between *pistis* and love (*agapè*) occurs already in the New Testament, most famously in 1 Corinthians 13:13.

²²² See Bolich, *Honest Belief*, chapter 9, especially 305–18.

²²³ Irenaeus (c. 125–200) was the great exponent of the *regula fidei*. See Bolich, *Honest Belief*, 322–339.

²²⁴ Twelve are identified in Bolich, *Honest Belief*.

ing God (e.g., encounters with the historical Jesus). A *spiritual* seeing remains, and it opens the door to a different epistemological path, one at variance with appeals to objective authority rooted in historical revelation. To grasp the rise of this alternative path requires first understanding why its need was so acutely felt.

Christian Wrestling with Philosophy

The rise to dominance in the West by Christianity meant a subordination of reason to revelation and a long, often uneasy, relationship between theology and philosophy. It shows especially in the Church Fathers' widely varying approaches to Greek and Hellenistic philosophy. On one side there is a positive, even enthusiastic appropriation of preexisting philosophy, and on the other side there is a stiff resistance to it.

Christianity early shows a genius for co-opting attractive features of its rivals, so the fact that some prominent Christians find qualities to admire and embrace in certain Greek philosophies is hardly surprising. Stoic thought wins favor over Epicureanism, and the Skeptics are dismissed outright. Centuries later Aristotle will emerge as the most favored Greek thinker, but early on this is not the case. Rather, his teacher Plato, especially as mediated through the Neoplatonists (3rd century), proves a greater influence among the Church Fathers.

A kind of mainstream view begins developing alongside the objectifying tendency of the *regula fidei* ("rule of faith") that stresses an intellectual, rational appropriation of revelation. To do so without sacrificing *pistis*, and thus capitulating into the speculative ideas

of Gnosticism and supplanting *pistis* by *gnosis*,²²⁵ the thinkers who are forming an orthodox Christianity have to accentuate a rational *pistis* (Latin *fides*). That involves an academic engagement with other rational thinkers, like professional philosophers.

Clement of Alexandria

Especially prominent among the Christians who take up this task is Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215). He had been the student of a scholar named Pantaenus, whom tradition attaches first to the Stoic school before he devoted himself to Christianity and became the head of the Christian thinkers at Alexandria in Egypt.²²⁶ Succeeding Pantaenus to the leadership of the Alexandrian school, Clement tries to breach the apparent gap between Greek philosophy and the faith of the Greek New Testament—between reason and belief, or metaphorically, between Athens and Jerusalem.

Clement draws not only on Christian Scripture, but also Greek philosophy, most especially the Platonists and the Stoics.²²⁷ He argues that it is perfectly human to philosophize, that it is an aspect of seeking life and is intrinsic both to belief and to love of God and neigh-

²²⁵ In the 2nd–3rd centuries a principal opponent of Christianity was Gnosticism, a label applied to a number of thinkers and systems that also called themselves Christian. The label builds on the Greek word *gnosis*, a basic term for “knowledge.” In Gnosticism the *gnosis* is a secret knowledge needed to secure salvation. It thus preserves an emphasis on revelation, but supplants *pistis* by *gnosis*.

²²⁶ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, V.10.1(end): “as he had been trained in the philosophical system of those called Stoics”; Greek: οἷα καὶ ἀπὸ φιλοσόφου ἀγωγῆς τῶν καλουμένων Στωϊκῶν ὥρμημένον. (*hoia kai apo philosophou agōgēs tōn kaloumenōn Stoikōn hōrēmenon*.)

²²⁷ Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 155, n. 1, lists Stoic, Platonic, Epicurean and Aristotelian influences on his ideas about faith.

bor.²²⁸ Like the Bible's Torah, the best of Greek philosophy is seen as anticipatory in character—part of the preparation God has made for the Gospel.²²⁹

Clement's epistemology retains *pistis* as the 'key.' In fact, he draws on that metaphor as he comments on John 10:9. "'For I am the door,' he says somewhere; we who desire to understand God must thoroughly learn in what manner God may spread heaven's gates wide open to us. For the gates of the Word (*logou*) being rational (*logikai*) are opened by the key of faith (*pisteōs*)."²³⁰ Reason and faith are like lock and key.²³¹

He uses philosophical terminology to describe the nature of *pistis* in an epistemological manner. After first noting that Greeks depreciate *pistis*, he draws on the vocabulary of Epicureanism and Stoicism to term *pistis* as a *prolepsis*—a "preconception." He further qualifies it, in Stoic fashion, as "assent" that is both "freely given" and "reverent." He caps his point by appeal to Hebrews 11:1, already embraced widely in the Church as offering an apostolic definition of *pistis*.²³²

²²⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *Pedagogus* (*The Guide*), III.11.78. He asks rhetorically, "How do you believe? How do you love God and your neighbor if you do not 'philosophize'?" Greek: Πῶς οὖν πεπίστευκας; Πῶς δὲ ἔτι ἀγαπᾷς τὸν θεὸν καὶ τὸν πλησίον σου μὴ φιλοσοφῶν; (*Pōs oun pepisteukas? Pōs de eti agapas ton theon kai ton plēsion sou mē philosophōn?*)

²²⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *Pedagogus*, I.6 (with Galatians 3:23–25 in mind); also see *Stromata* (*Miscellanies*), I.5 and I:17.

²³⁰ *The writings of Clement of Alexandria*, vol. I, p. 25 (*Protrepticus*, ch. 1 (end)). The Greek *logikai* (from λογικός, *logikos*) refers to that which is possessed of reason.

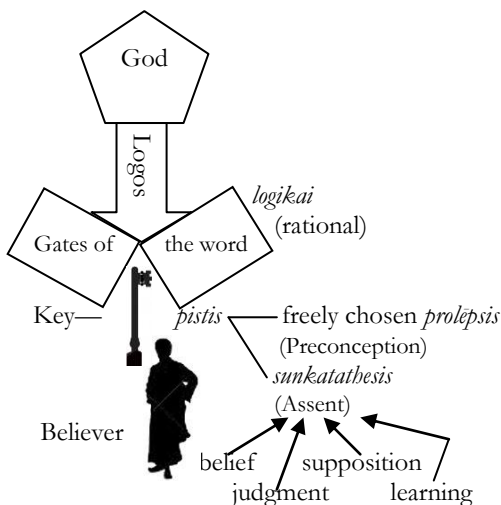
²³¹ In a manner that would become even more notable later, Clement, *Stromata*, II.2, appeals to Isaiah 7:9 for the sense that faith is necessary for understanding. Also see *Stromata*, I.1.

²³² Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, II.2. He exaggeratedly reports the Greeks are "accusers" (διαβάλλουσι, *diaballousi*) who call *pistis*

Elsewhere he writes, in language heavily freighted with terms we have seen throughout our examination of Greek philosophy:

All belief (*doxa*), then, and judgment (*krisis*), and supposition (*hupolēpsis*), and learning (*mathēsis*), by which we live and have eternal union with humanity, is assent (*sunkatathesis*)—and that is nothing other than *pistis*.²³³

Clement's conception may be depicted this way:



“empty and barbarous” (κενήν και βάρβαρον, *kenēn kai barbaron*). The term for “assent” (συγκατάθεσις, *sunkatathesis*) is the same found earlier in the discussion of Stoicism. The phrase “freely given” renders ἐκούσιός (*hekousios*), which might also be translated “willingly” or “voluntarily.” The English “reverent” renders θεοσεβείας (*theosebeias*), which might also be translated as “devout” or even “godly.” On Hebrews 11:1 (“Now faith is . . .”) see Bolich, *Honest Belief*, 282–96.

²³³ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, II.12.

Christian *pistis*—freely chosen—is a preconception making possible and necessary an assent forged from belief, supposition, judgment, and learning.

The opposition to efforts like that mounted by Clement has come to be summarized by a famous remark made by Tertullian (c. 160–c. 240), “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What the Academy with the Church?”²³⁴ The answer for many is a resounding and fixed denial that Christianity has anything to do with philosophy. Such sentiment, in the 4th century, is voiced by John Chrysostom in his preaching on the New Testament text of 1 Corinthians 2:18–31, where he claims of Paul: “For he cast out Plato, not through another philosopher of greater wisdom, but by a fisherman without learning.”²³⁵ But where does that lead?

Objective Knowledge vs. Subjective Knowledge: Dogma vs. Mysticism

The portrait of Christian epistemology to this point has been of the mainstream response of Christian thinkers who practiced theology and philosophy under the same rational hat. For them revelation became

²³⁴ Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* [On the Prescription against Heretics], 7: *Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis? Quid Academiae et Ecclesiae? Quid haereticis et Christianis?*

²³⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, Homily 4.4 (end): *Kai γὰρ Πλάτωνα ἐξέβαλεν, οὐχὶ δι' ἑτέρου φιλοσόφου σοφωτέρου, ἀλλὰ διὰ ἁλιεύς ἀμαθοῦς.* (*Kai gar Platōna exebalen, ouchi di' heterou philosophou sophōterou, alla dia halieūs amathous.*) The reference, of course, is to Peter. The Greek ἐξέβαλεν (*exebalen*), “cast out,” is the same term used in the Gospels for casting out demons. In the New Testament, also see Colossians 2:8. On the other side of the matter, consider Paul’s engagement with an audience including Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (τῶν Ἐπικουρείων καὶ Στωϊκῶν φιλοσόφων) in his presentation at Athens recorded in Acts 17:16–34.

more and more objective in character as the roles of Bible and Church authority accentuated doctrine and dogma in propositional forms (creeds, confessions, catechisms and so forth). Accordingly, *pistis*, the key to revelation, itself became more objectified so that in the Latin Church the *fides* (Greek counterpart to *pistis*) of the faithful increasingly meant assent and submission to the 'rule of faith' (*regula fidei*).

Predictably, a countermovement soon developed to reinvigorate the subjective dimension of *pistis* and the immediate personal encounter implicit in revelation. In Christian mysticism an affirmation is made that the kind of encounter the apostle Paul (and Jesus' disciples) had is not precluded for Christians living after the apostolic age. Just as Alexandria was the center of thinking about *pistis* as a rational faith, it was also the early center of a vision of a 'higher' path. In the 3rd-4th centuries, both in the Alexandrian school and in the Egyptian desert outside the city, the idea of a mystical faith superior to what could be attained by mere human reason was developed and actively practiced.

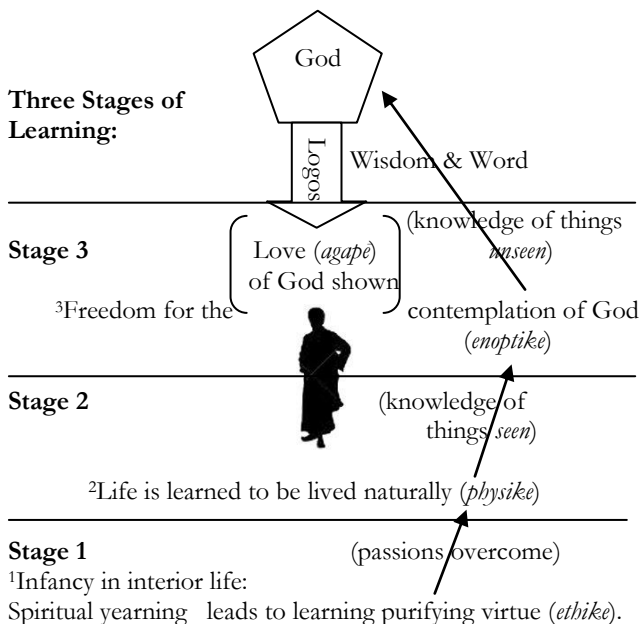
Origen of Alexandria

At Alexandria the first prominent figure associated with this development is Origen of Alexandria (c. 185–c. 254), most especially with his commentary on the Song of Songs.²³⁶ Origen was well-schooled in philosophy and rational thinking; he had studied with Ammonius Saccas, who later taught Plotinus (architect of Neo-Platonism).

Origen sees a mystical path upon which the Christian soul passes through three stages: learning virtue

²³⁶ Origen, *Commentary on Song of Songs*.

(*ethike*) first, then attaining a proper orientation to Nature (*physike*), and finally ascending to a reason-above-reason, the contemplation of God (*enoptike*). The last remains centered in the Word (*Logos*) of God.²³⁷ Like Plato, his epistemology has gradations:



In his remarks on the Song of Songs Origen offers an image that helps capture his vision. It is of the patriarch Abraham, father of faith, sitting outside his tent at midday. Origen likens this to having removed the mind from all distractions, placing it ‘outside’ and ready for visitation from God.²³⁸ However, Origen leaves his

²³⁷ Louth, *Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, 52–64.

²³⁸ Origen, *Commentary on Song of Songs*, II.4.

thinking on such matters relatively undeveloped. For a more complete conception of what might be called ‘mystical epistemology’ we must look elsewhere.

Evagrius Ponticus

Perhaps the most complete development of a theology of mysticism in early Christianity appears in the writings of Evagrius Ponticus (c. 345–399). He envisions the spiritual life as having two grand stages. The first, foundational stage, is *praktikē* (πρακτική), the “practice” of an ascetic life with its withdrawal from the world and its concerns. This stage is initiated by *pistis*—the same faith by which one begins Christian life. In this stage the goal is freedom from dominance by one’s passions to achieve *apatheia*, “passionlessness,” which—perhaps counterintuitively for modern folk—leads to love (*agape*). This first stage is like Origen’s *ethike*, and similarly ends in achieving the goal of *apatheia*.²³⁹

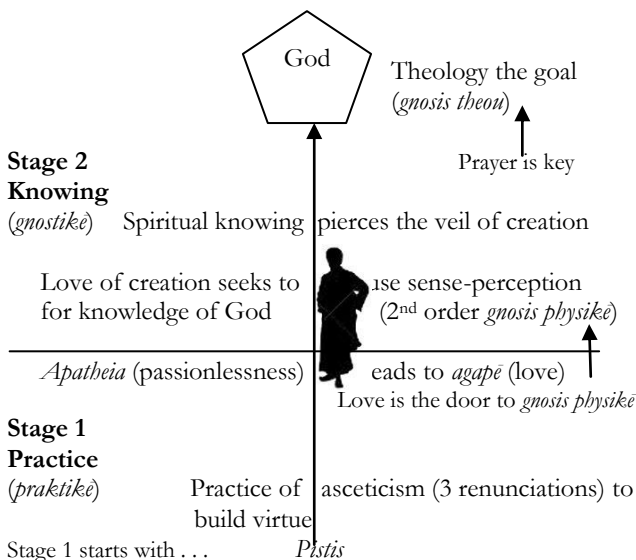
Upon the foundation of *praktikē* is built the second stage, *gnostikē* (γνωστική), the “knowing” of the mystic.²⁴⁰ This stage, however, is not all of one nature. It has gradations and the first corresponds to Origen’s stage of *physike*. Evagrius terms it *gnosis physikē* (γνώσις φυσική), “natural knowledge,” or *gnosis theōria* (θεωρία), “natural contemplation.” It is a knowing of Nature that leads to seeing the divine presence in creation, originally through the employment of the physical senses,

²³⁹ Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos*, 78; *Skemmata*, 3. For an introduction to his work, see Harmless, *Desert Christians*.

²⁴⁰ Konstantinovskiy, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 1, immediately makes clear in her study of Evagrius’ *gnosis* that “It is Clement’s use of the concept and term of γνώσις, in the sense of partaking of the life of divinity, that forms the basis of Evagrius’ understanding.”

which is a ‘second order’ knowing. A higher knowing—‘first order’ knowing—is seeing the unseen. It is a piercing of the veil in creation to see the Creator. Only then can this stage’s goal—theology proper—be realized.²⁴¹

The thinking of Evagrius Ponticus leads to this:



The believer must first master a way of life that creates separation from the world. The life of *pistis* begins with belief born of a fear of God, practices self-restraint with perseverance and hope, all of which lead to *apatheia*. The natural outcome—‘offspring’—of passionlessness is love, the door to real knowing. It is a

²⁴¹ See Bradford, “Natural Contemplation.” Also see Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 345, 349–50.

knowing the nature of things, first of natural things (creation) and then of God (creator).²⁴²

Augustine's Union

The greatest Church Father, Augustine of Hippo (354–430), early in his career was strongly influenced by Origen. The power of the mystical tradition might be seen in Augustine's *Confessions*, though it is not as a theologian of mysticism that he makes his most significant contribution to epistemology.²⁴³ Instead, he more than any other figure frames a way in which to regard and balance the subjective and objective sides of *pistis* (*fides*).

Augustine distinguishes in Christian faith *what* is believed (*quae creduntur*) from *how* it is believed (*qua creduntur*). The former is objective content—real things of past, present or future, things that exist independent of the mind. It is, in familiar theological language, about things *seen*. The latter is subjective process—the means by which the objective content is grasped. It is highly individual yet while unique to each believer it is also like

²⁴² Evagrius Ponticus, *Letter to Anatolius*, 8.47–51 (cited in Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 29).

²⁴³ In Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* (*The Literal Meaning of Genesis*), XII (end), identifies three types of vision: "one by means of the eyes. . . another by means of a person's spirit. . . a third by means of mental contemplation." Latin of XII.6.15: *tria genera visionum occurrunt: unum per oculos, quibus ipsae litterae videntur; alterum per spiritum hominis quo proximus et absens cogitatur; tertium per contuitum mentis, quo ipsa dilectio intellecta conspicitur* (Augustine here is illustrating the three in reference to the Scriptural text of Mark 12:31).

enough to what happens in other believers to warrant calling it ‘one faith.’²⁴⁴

Faith (*fides*) is both belief (*quae creditur*) and believing (*qua creditur*)—a product and a process. Both fit within a larger epistemological context. Augustine uses the imagery of “seeing” and, as many before him, distinguishes ‘knowing’ of things immediately available to sense-perception from ‘believing’ things unseen but credible, such as eye-witness testimony. Knowing of things unseen relies on the testimony of others.²⁴⁵

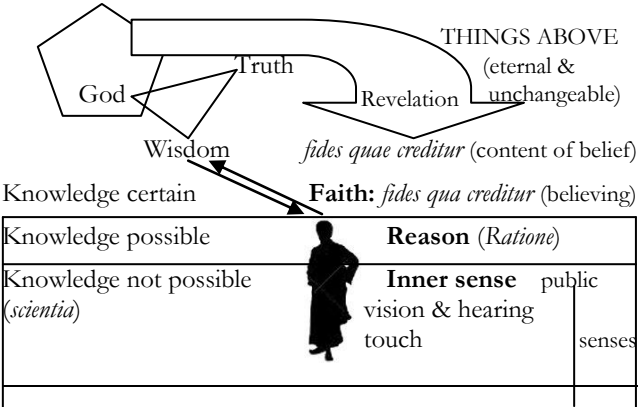
As the above may suggest, Augustine’s epistemology is congenial to philosophical ideas found in the world of his time, especially those of Neoplatonism. In an early work on the freedom of the human will (*De Libero Arbitrio*), he builds a scheme much like a Greek philosopher, starting from a foundation in sense-perception (hierarchically arranged according to more public—e.g., vision and hearing—and less public senses). Above sense-perception is reason, but between these two exists an “inner adjudicator” (*interiore ... diiudicantur*), which is an “inner sense” (*interiorem ... sensum*). With respect to both sense-perception and reason, individual differences exist, yet both are human abilities shared to some extent by all. Moreover, they are separate abilities such that reason can exist independent of sense-perception.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIII.2.5. The key portion is *sed aliud sunt ea quae creduntur, aliud fides qua creduntur*—“but that which is believed is different from the faith by which it is believed.”

²⁴⁵ Augustine, *Epistula*, CXLVII.2.7.

²⁴⁶ Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio* (*Of Free Will*), II.3.8.25–26, II.7.15.58–59, II.7.16.63–78 (sense-perception); II.3.8.26–9.29,

Augustine writes, “But unless these things move beyond the body’s senses, it is not possible for them to arrive at knowledge (*scientiam*). In fact, whatever we know (*scimus*) is because we comprehend it by reason (*ratione*).”²⁴⁷ However, Augustine argues that reason inconsistently seeks truth; it is inconstant and changeable. It glimpses something higher than itself that is eternal and unchangeable.²⁴⁸ That is the truth reason sometimes seeks, and it is Wisdom.²⁴⁹ Wisdom gives power to be wise to rational souls.²⁵⁰ This Wisdom is of God, received by faith (*in fidem recepimus*), a *fides* by which we also “achieve a firm but delicate form of knowledge (*cognitionis*).”²⁵¹ This all may be sketched as follows:



II.4.10.38–40, II.5.12.45–49 (inner sense); II.3.9.35–36, II.7.15.60–61, II.8.20.79–80 (reason); II.8.20.81–93 (independence of reason).

²⁴⁷ Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, II.3.9.29. Latin: *Sed nisi et istum transeat, quod ad nos refertur a sensibus corporis, pervenire ad scientiam non potest. Quicquid enim scimus, id ratione comprehensum tenemus.*

²⁴⁸ Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, II.6.14.55–56.

²⁴⁹ Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, II.9.25.96–10.28.112; II.13.36.141.

²⁵⁰ Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, II.11.31.125–27.

²⁵¹ Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, II.15.39.154–55. Latin (155): *sed etiam certa, quamvis adhuc tenuissima forma cognitionis adtingimus.*

WORLD (impermanent & changeable)

It is easy to see the lingering influence of Platonism.

After Augustine: Anselm & Peter Lombard

Augustine's ideas have proved immensely influential. His concept of *fides quae* and *fides qua* was subsequently refined by theologians like Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033–1109) and the Lombard (c. 1096–1160).

Anselm distinguishes between a “living faith,” which combines Augustine's two kinds of *fides*, and a “dead faith,” which has only Augustine's *fides quae*. In other words, a living faith believes in the received content of faith that one ought to accept. A dead faith, by contrast, may acknowledge the content of belief but has no vested interest in it.²⁵²

But epistemologically, Anselm's greatest contribution is his articulation of another of Augustine's contributions—an emphasis on a text from the Hebrew prophet Isaiah (7:9), which Augustine construes as ‘believing precedes understanding.’²⁵³ Anselm, however, is the one who takes this idea and develops it into its most famous expression. He writes, “Indeed, not only do I not seek to understand in order to believe (*intelli-*

²⁵² Anselm, *Monologion*, 77 (end)). “Living faith”: *viva fides*. The 20th century Protestant theologian Karl Barth, *Anselm*, 33–34, characterizes Anselm's living faith as the believer must believe what is right and rightly believe it.

²⁵³ Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 29.6 [John 7:14–18]: “Do you desire to understand? Believe.” Latin: *Intelligere vis? Crede*. See the larger context in the English translation of Gibb and Innes, in Augustine, *Lectures*, 184.

gere ut credam), but I believe in order to understand (*credo ut intelligam*). For this I also believe: ‘unless I will have believed, I shall not have understood.’”²⁵⁴

The Lombard also adopts, then adapts Augustine’s sense of *fides quae* and *fides qua*. He distinguishes three aspects of faith: *credere in Deum* (believing in God), *credere Deo* (believing God), and *credere Deum* (believing in a God). He writes, “It is one matter to believe in God, and another to believe God, and yet another to believe there is a God.”²⁵⁵ The first two preserve Augustine’s balance of subjective (*credere in Deum*) and objective (*credere Deo*) sides; the last aspect is also objective, but devoid of value.

Like so many before him, the Lombard looks to Hebrews 11:1 as providing a ‘definition’ of faith (*pistis* or Latin *fides*). “From these words it is evident that faith itself is delivered in the human heart to be seen by it not physically, or by the imagination, but by the intellect (*intellectualiter*). . . .”²⁵⁶ This is a rational faith, but not one that is so purely rational that it can ‘believe’ like the demons believe—seeing the truth but refusing to invest in it (Lombard’s *credere in Deum*, ‘believing in God’ as a mere fact).

Both Anselm and Peter Lombard embrace a Christian tradition where knowledge means more than the possession of sufficient information; it requires understanding. That understanding, while rational, depends upon *fides* in both its subjective and objective aspects.

²⁵⁴ Anselm, *Proslogion*, 1 (end)). Latin: *Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam. Nam et hoc credo: quia ‘nisi credidero, non intelligam.’*

²⁵⁵ Lombard, *Sentences*, III.Distinction 23.4.1 [23, D].

²⁵⁶ Lombard, *Sentences*, III.Distinction 23.7.3 [23, C].

Christian knowledge is never only an acknowledgment of God's existence, nor is it just accepting as true a body of belief. It requires personal trust, an assent investing the self in revealed objective content and doing so in order to have relationship with God.

Aquinas' Division

In the 13th century, the greatest Catholic theologian since Augustine, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), builds a monumental theological edifice. Aquinas develops an epistemology rooted in past Christian thinking but elaborates it in a distinctive fashion. Let us begin with how he works with two figures we have just considered—Augustine and Peter Lombard.

Augustine's epistemology characterizes believing as a kind of thinking which yields assent.²⁵⁷ Aquinas clarifies such a notion in defending Augustine against this objection: if Augustine rightly discerns a difference between a 'knower' (*sciens*) and a 'believer' (*credente*)—with the knower thinking something over then deciding whether to assent to it—then belief cannot be simply a matter of thinking yielding assent, for that is what a knower does when making inquiry into any matter.²⁵⁸

Against this objection Aquinas maintains that Augustine has correctly characterized belief (*credere*) as a particular kind of understanding (*intellectus*). He argues that "understanding" entails two mental operations: first, simply forming a sense of what a thing is; second,

²⁵⁷ Augustine, *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum* (*On the Predestination of the Saints*), 5 (beginning): *Quamquam et ipsum credere, nihil aliud est, quam cum assensione cogitare.*

²⁵⁸ Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate* (*Disputed Questions about Truth*), Q. 14, Article 1, Difficulties, 1–2.

it is manipulating concepts so as to discern truth. Belief, Aquinas argues, is only concerned with the second operation. It assents to what is true, while disbelieving what is false.²⁵⁹

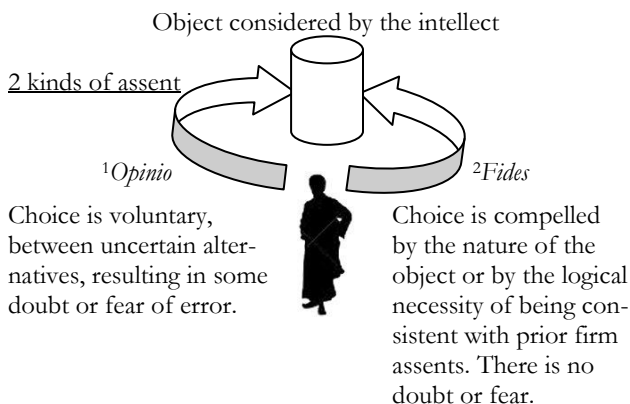
If Plato is the patron philosopher for Augustine, it is Aristotle who serves that role for Aquinas. Like Aristotle, Aquinas carefully parses terms and ideas, drawing logical distinctions and elaborating lines of thought with careful demonstrations to demonstrate their reasonableness. Thus, for example, when defending the Lombard's threefold distinction of *fides* outlined above, Aquinas clarifies that *fides* is not being described by the Lombard as having three acts but remains one 'habit' with three distinct relations to the object of faith, which in formal terms is "the Foremost Truth," or God. To this highest truth the will must move the intellect to give assent.²⁶⁰

The above gives some idea of how Aquinas works. Given his immense volume of work, like so many other figures we consider, we can at best roughly sum up his epistemology. Let us return to the idea of "assent," or more precisely, the assent of the intellect (*assensum intellectus*). Aquinas explains that *fides* is differentiated from mere *opinio* (belief as "opinion") by the kind of assent each offers. The assent of *fides* is an agreement with the obvious truthfulness of what has been presented to the intellect. This might come about from a matter being so obvious and convincing *as is* that it gains assent (as in the case of so-called 'first principles'). Or it might fol-

²⁵⁹ Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*, Q. 14, Article 1, Reply. Latin (for the last idea): *credimus enim vero, et discredimus falsum*.

²⁶⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II^a–II^{ae} q.2 a. 2 co. "Foremost Truth" renders *veritas prima*.

low from logical reasoning based on things already assented to, such as occurs in science. The approval of the intellect thus derives from the very nature of the matter; it is, as we might say, compelled. On the other hand, the assent of *opinio* is a matter of the will, a choosing. Aquinas notes that the assent of *fides* is a choice so certain that neither doubt nor fear of error enters in; with *opinio* either doubt or fear is always present.²⁶¹ The matter looks like this:



This picture, however, belongs within a larger one. Aquinas immediately after discussing these matters about the assent of *fides* and *opinio* then notes that both pertain to situations where things are *unseen* and therefore not matters properly belonging to either sense-perception or reason.²⁶² Nevertheless, he is careful to insist that Christian believers do not credulously believe what is *incredible* (i.e., *not* credible). Believing assent

²⁶¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II^a–IIae q.1 a. 4 co.

²⁶² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II^a–IIae q.1 a. 4 co. (end).

follows persuasion as outlined above, and then produces a conviction that makes it possible to “see” the unseen (along the lines of Hebrews 11:1).²⁶³

This paints a familiar picture. But we need to note some of Aquinas’ further thoughts. We may, for the sake of simplicity, list some key notions:

1. Knowledge, *fides*, and *opinio* are different things, but the distinction between knowledge and *opinio* is greater than that between knowledge and *fides*.
2. *Opinio* requires uncertainty, knowledge requires certainty; they can never be the same.²⁶⁴
3. *Fides*, because it is a kind of “seeing,” is also a kind of knowing—of unseen things.²⁶⁵
4. Because *fides* is about what is unseen, believing and knowing (which is about what is seen) do not simultaneously occur.²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II^a–IIae q.1 a. 4 ad 2. On Hebrews 11:1, see *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*, Q. 14, Article 2, Reply.

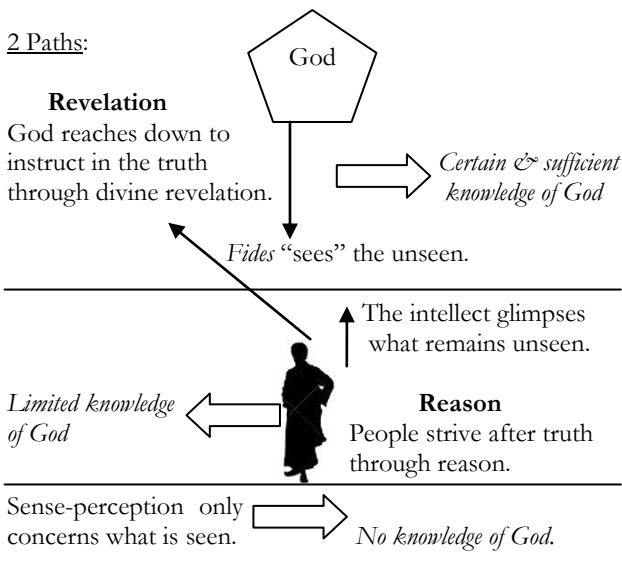
²⁶⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II^a–IIae q.1 a. 5 ad 4. Latin: *Scientia enim cum opinione simul esse non potest simpliciter de eodem, quia de ratione scientiae est quod id quod scitur existimetur esse impossibile aliter se habere; de ratione autem opinionis est quod id quod quis existimat, existimet possibile aliter se habere*. Cf. I^a q. 32 a. 1 co., and especially I^a q. 2 a. 2 ad 1, in response to Objection 1.

²⁶⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I^a q. 12 a. 13 ad 3: *Ad tertium dicendum quod fides cognitio quaedam est, inquantum intellectus determinatur per fidem ad aliquod cognoscibile*. See II^a–IIae q.1 a. 5 ad 1, where he says Christians know things by “the light of faith” (*per lumen fidei*), which light causes them to see what ought to be believed (*videntur esse credenda*).

²⁶⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II^a–IIae q.1 a. 5 co.). Latin: *Unde etiam impossibile est quod ab eodem idem sit scitum et creditum*. Knowing has to do with what is seen. The Latin term is *scitum*.

5. The above suggests that what is now only believed can one day be known.²⁶⁷
6. The complementariness of knowledge and *fides* rests in the fact that God has established two paths: reason and revelation.

Aquinas reasons as follows: salvation depends upon knowledge of the truth of God, and some knowledge of such truth is apprehensible by human reason—but because such means by itself would result in only a few achieving such knowledge, and then only after prolonged effort and with errors mixed in, God provides revelation to teach divine truth.²⁶⁸ As a result, the basic epistemological framework looks like this:



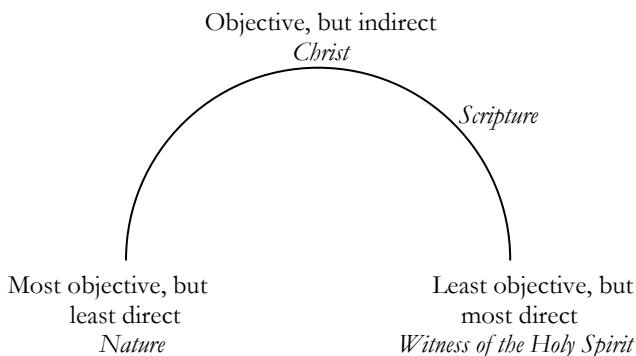
²⁶⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II^a–II^ae q.1 a. 5 co. He uses the Trinity as an example; it is believed now, but will be known later.

²⁶⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I^a q. 1 a. 1 co.

Human reason (*ratione humana*) builds up philosophical knowledge (*philosophicas disciplinas*), but what is reached for in this manner falls short of its intended object. Therefore revelation is needed, which provides sacred knowledge (*sacram doctrinam*). But, as we will see, Aquinas' achievement has unintended consequences.

Revelation as a Way of Knowing

Eventually, Christianity develops a much enlarged sense of revelation as a way of knowing beyond that first envisioned in the New Testament. A continuum emerges that looks like this:



The highest revelation remains the self-disclosure of God in Christ. As an objective matter it is historically conditioned, meaning that it comes to those believers after Christ's time on earth through indirect means—the testimony of others (e.g., Scripture). The subjective dimension, received by living faith is the personally experienced relationship with God, formally described as the witness of the Holy Spirit (*testimonium Spiritus Sancti*). Epistemologically, the Holy Spirit serves as the supreme witness experientially, but this witness points to

the more objective grounds of Scripture. Perhaps ironically—at least from the standpoint of philosophy—the most objective revelation is the least direct in terms of conveying the relational elements. Nature offers indirect “signs”: the creation pointing to a Creator.

The general manner of how revelation is related to believing and knowing looks like this:

(Truth = Revelation) → Believing & Knowing

In this view the only proper way to proceed is by starting from the assumption that Truth is disclosed through God’s self-initiated revelation, which precedes and generates a believing response and which constitutes both the source and nature of knowledge. But it is easy to see in such a broad characterization that neither reason nor sense-perception are required, even if both are impacted. This means that wildly divergent conceptions of revelation can and have developed, including a complete separation from any dependence whatsoever on a human faculty like reason.

Aquinas’ desire, like that of many figures before him and since, is to show the reasonableness of *fides*. For him, both reason and *fides* are desirable. They are partners in the striving for knowledge of the highest truth, namely God.

But partners can be separated. Aquinas’ reconciliation of *fides* and reason became for many subsequent thinkers a feat that instead separated reason and faith, making it possible to keep them apart. Many later figures see Aquinas as having paved the way to sever faith

from reason entirely.²⁶⁹ An unintended consequence was the revitalization of older philosophical paths.

²⁶⁹ Hergenhahn and Henley, *Introduction to the History of Psychology*, 85, sum up Aquinas' achievement as having "divided reason and faith, making it possible to study them separately." Anglican Bishop Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 18, remarks on the same matter that, "Here one sees the origin of that split which runs right through contemporary Western thought. . . ."

Chapter 9

Descartes' Rationalism

Inadvertently, Aquinas created a split between revelation and reason that once again opened the door for Christian thinkers to appeal whole-heartedly to reason rather than revelation as epistemological grounds for knowledge. This is not to suggest that such thinkers necessarily rejected revelation, nor even that they formally subordinated it. Rather, they set it to one side, the side left to theologians, and instead took up again the traditional tasks of Western philosophy.

To be sure, some thinkers all along had attempted such a move, even before Aquinas. For example, the Christian philosopher Peter Abelard (1079–1142) demonstrates his confidence in reason's ability to establish theology as a science capable of knowing God. But he ran into the formidable opposition of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), Christian mystic and defender of divine mysteries that must be left to faithful acceptance of God's revelation and nothing more. Abelard lost.²⁷⁰

The triumph of Scholasticism, with Aquinas and the Lombard as its greatest champions, certainly meant

²⁷⁰ For a brief review of both figures and their conflict, see Bolich, *Honest Belief*, 585–89. On Abelard, as British philosopher John Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard*, 327–28, puts it, “It was a central (perhaps *the* central) feature of Abelard's theology to insist that not merely the existence of God, but also his nature as a trinity of power, wisdom and love, is and has been knowable to all through reason and the testimony of the created universe.”

a prominent role for reason, but always a subordinate and supportive one; its place is as the servant of revelation. In the period between Aquinas' death in 1274 and the inauguration of the Reformation in 1517, Scholasticism remained dominant but hardly monolithic. Indeed, figures as diverse as the mystic Meister Eckhart (1260–1328); Martin Luther's teacher, nominalist philosopher William of Ockham (1287–1347); and the prince of the Renaissance, Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), all appear in this span of history.²⁷¹

Each in his own way reacts to Aquinas' split. Eckhart is a mystic, but a rational one; he resists Aquinas' division because the experience of mystical union with God is also an epistemological union of revelation and reason—one path, not two. On the other hand, William of Ockham widens the distance between Aquinas' paths of *ratio* and *fides*, if not actually setting them in opposite directions. Ockham sees a more limited reach and power for reason, prioritizes God's volitional nature over a rational one, and argues that *fides* suffices to secure Christian theology. Erasmus hearkens back to figures before Aquinas—Clement of Alexandria and Origen. More invested in developing a Christian ethics than a Christian epistemology, he favors Augustine over Aristotle, and champions a simple faith with a modest commitment to reason.

The radicalism of Martin Luther (1483–1546) results in revolution more than reformation; rather than a new unity characterized by his vision, European Christianity reacts by splitting into faith communities with sharply

²⁷¹ For a brief review of their thinking, see Bolich, *Honest Belief*, 401–12.

different *fides*. An Augustinian brother before becoming a Reformer, Luther retains Augustine's distinction between *fides quae* and *fides qua*. But he is profoundly influenced by William of Ockham's ideas, such as the notion that there is knowledge more fundamental than that which science yields,²⁷² exactly the kind of knowledge that relational *fides* yields. Thus he praises experiential knowing.²⁷³ Rejecting Scholastic theology, Luther excoriates Aristotle, a "foul philosopher,"²⁷⁴ and variously labels Aquinas a "heretic," "Sophist," and "cow."²⁷⁵ If Aquinas split *ratio* and *fides*, he at least retained a friendly cooperation between them—a hand-in-hand partnership. In Luther one hand turns against

²⁷² The distinction in Latin is signified by the terms *notitia* and *scientia*. The former, deriving from *nosco*, -ere, "to know," refers to knowledge by acquaintance; in classical Latin literature it can signify the most intimate kind of 'knowing' (see Caesar, *The Gallic Wars*, VI.21.5, where it is used like the Hebrew יָדָע (*yada'*) to signify sexual relations. The latter, *scientia*, is derived from *scio*, *scire*, "to know," but referring to knowing following inquiry or investigation. For more, see the entries in De Vaan, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin*.

²⁷³ See, for example, Luther, Ps. 5:11 ('Concerning Hope and Sufferings'), where he argues that even understanding following reading does not make a theologian, but only by living—and intense living at that, given his examples of experience, condemnation and death! See Cole's translation of Luther, *Commentary*, 243, for context and translation.

²⁷⁴ Luther, *Randbemerkungen zu den Sentenzen des Petrus Lombardus*, Dist. 17 c. 5. (WA 1.9, p. 43): *Quia commentum illud de habitibus opinionem habet ex verbis Aristotelis rancidi philosophi*. Cf. Luther, *Disputatio contra Scholasticam Theologiam*, 41, where he calls Aristotle the enemy of grace: *Tota fere Aristotelis Ethica pessima est gratiae inimica*.

²⁷⁵ See Janz, *Luther on Thomas Aquinas*, p. 4.

the other. Reason is depreciated except as reformed and disciplined by Christian experience.²⁷⁶

In the intellectual chaos attending the Protestant Reformation a number of figures turned away from a fundamental dependence on revelation or upon *sola fides* and sought instead to return to human abilities and efforts. The most notable of these is a Frenchman who would in time be called ‘the Father of Modern Philosophy.’

René Descartes (1596–1650) associates knowledge most especially with the quality of *certainty*.²⁷⁷ How to establish the most secure foundation for knowledge possible he accepts as a grand test to any epistemological claim. Thus, he shifts the center of attention away from *what* knowledge is to *how* knowledge is best secured, and in examining that matter accepts the Skeptics’ challenge to answer *if* knowledge is even possible at all. From Descartes forward this attention to the *how* of knowing occupies center stage.

²⁷⁶ For a brief overview, see Bolich, *Honest Belief*, 595–98. See especially Luther, *Die Disputation de Homine* (*Disputation concerning Man*), Theses 4–9: Also see Luther, *Ad Galatas Commentarius* (*Commentary on Galatians*), Argumentum Epistolae S. Pauli ad Galatas [WA 1.40.1, p. 42] and 1, 3 [WA 1.40.1, p. 86]; also see, for example, his comment on Gal. 2:14 (end), on reason’s inability to hold Christ in a firm embrace (*Ratio enim et natura humana non haeret Christo firmiter in amplexibus*). Also see *Heidelberg Disputation* (*Martinus Lutherus apud Augustinianos hujus inclytæ civitatis Heidelbergensis*), Philosophical theses, 30 (on reason only rightly being used after becoming a Christian): *Sicut libidinis malo non utitur bene, nisi conjugatis; ita nemo philosophatur bene, nisi stultus, id est, Christianus*.

²⁷⁷ Dicker, *Descartes*, 3, remarks that the quest for certainty “is the engine that drives Descartes’ *Meditations* as a whole.”

Descartes & Skepticism

The ancient Skeptics had been fully rediscovered by Europeans by the 16th century when their ideas proved especially pertinent for responding to the chaos inspired by the dogmatic proclamations of competing religious parties.²⁷⁸ Remember, the ancient Skeptics, according to Sextus Empiricus, had been disquieted by the philosophical tumult of their own time, with what they saw as equally plausible arguments on every side. A similar situation can surely be seen in the early 17th century when Descartes arrives on the scene. The Copernican revolution of the first half of the 16th century, with its heliocentric view, had upset the long held Western conviction of humanity's importance as the dominant force on an earth at the center of the universe. Coupled with the Reformation and the potent humanism of the late Renaissance, when Skeptic thinking reemerged, it was met by many receptive minds.

So it is understandable that in his 1637 *Discourse on the Method* (*Discours de la Methode*) Descartes applies systematic doubt as a Skeptic might—and for the same reason: to test whether anything certain can be obtained. He is convinced by so doing that he has found certainty. Ironically, he is immediately attacked by various contemporaries as only having presented a philosophical capitulation that undermines Christian certainty rather than establishes it.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ For a brief treatment, see Schmitt, "Rediscovery." Popkin, *History of Skepticism*, sees a pivotal role played by the rediscovery precisely in the religious controversies sparked by the Reformation,

²⁷⁹ See Popkin, *History of Skepticism*, 158–73. Popkin (158) begins his discussion with this observation: "Descartes, having presented his

The Method

In the *Discourse* Descartes announces modestly that he is not prescribing a course for others but merely describing what he himself follows for the sake of obtaining a clear and certain knowledge.²⁸⁰ His desire is a familiar one: to know the truth so as to live rightly—epistemology joined to ethics.²⁸¹

Descartes sets for himself four precepts to follow:

1. Only accept as true that which is knowledge (i.e., both so clear and so distinct as to be certain).
2. In anything being examined render its difficulties into as many separable parts as possible and as needed to solve the difficulty.
3. Proceed from the simplest to the more complex.
4. Be so complete and thorough as to leave no doubt that something was left out.²⁸²

Following these precepts, he reports, permits him to exercise the power of reason to his fullest ability.²⁸³

triumphant conquest of the sceptical dragon, immediately found himself denounced as a dangerous Pyrrhonist and unsuccessful dogmatist whose theories were only fantasies and illusions.”

²⁸⁰ Descartes, *Discourse*, Part I [French ed., 1–4] (Veitch, 3–5).

²⁸¹ Descartes, *Discourse*, Part I, end [French ed., 8] (Veitch, 9).

²⁸² Descartes, *Discourse*, Part II, paragraphs 7–10 [French ed., 14] (Veitch, 15–16). The first precept addresses Descartes’ answer to *what* knowledge is. French: *Le premier était de ne recevoir jamais aucune chose pour vraie que je ne la connusse évidemment être telle; c’est-à-dire, d’éviter soigneusement la précipitation et la prévention, et de ne comprendre rien de plus en mes jugements que ce qui se présenteroit si clairement et si distinctement à mon esprit, que je n’eusse aucune occasion de le mettre en doute.*

²⁸³ Descartes, *Discourse*, Part II, end [French ed., 16–17] (Veitch, 18).

The exercise of reason compels Descartes to suspend judgment²⁸⁴—a core Skeptic commitment. The suspension of judgment is accompanied by the exercise of doubting—or more accurately, *systematic doubting*. He explains, “Making myself in each subject reflect particularly about what might make it doubtful and give me an opportunity to make mistakes, I uprooted from my mind all the errors that had previously slipped in.” He then proceeds to address an obvious concern: “Not that I imitated the Sceptics, who doubt only to doubt, and put forth the pretense of being always unresolved; for, on the contrary, my whole purpose was only to assure myself....” Indeed, he continues, his method yields “sufficient certainty” (*assez certaine*).²⁸⁵

Descartes resolves to rigorously doubt anything that can be doubted. This immediately means declining to accept as certain anything that sense-perception, demonstrably prone to error, may yield.²⁸⁶ Of course, reason also can be wrong, and in fact, upon close consideration, one may wonder what difference exists between a waking state and dreaming, so that it is possible to doubt anything that enters the mind at any time.

²⁸⁴ Descartes, *Discourse*, Part III, beginning [French ed., 17] (Veitch, 19).

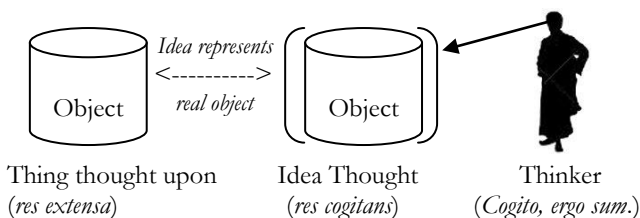
²⁸⁵ Descartes, *Discourse*, Part III, paragraph 6 [French ed., 21–22] (Veitch, 23). French (1st quote): *faisant particulièrement réflexion en chaque matière sur ce qui la pouvoit rendre suspecte et nous donner occasion de nous méprendre, je déracinois cependant de mon esprit toutes les erreurs qui s’y étoient pu glisser auparavant*. 2nd quote: *Non que j’imitasse pour cela les sceptiques, qui ne doutent que pour douter, et affectent d’être toujours irrésolus; car, au contraire, tout mon dessein ne tendoit qu’à m’assurer....* Both quotes from p. 22 of the French ed. See Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, 150.

²⁸⁶ Descartes, *Discourse*, Part IV, beginning [French ed., 24] (Veitch, 26).

However, Descartes realizes, even while thinking that everything is false there remains one obvious and inescapable fact: he as a thinker must be doing the thinking. Here is a clear and certain truth: *Cogito, ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am.”).²⁸⁷

Descartes decides he now possesses a clear and certain truth, one that constitutes a “first principle of philosophy” (*premier principe de la philosophie*). Focusing on the nature of this first principle he writes, “I judged that I could take as a general rule that the things which we conceive very clearly and distinctly are all true, but that there is some difficulty in pointing out clearly what are those which we conceive distinctly.”²⁸⁸ Note what it is that he calls ‘clear and distinct’: conceptions, or *ideas*.

His answer to what one knows looks like this:²⁸⁹



²⁸⁷ Descartes, *Discourse*, Part IV, para. 1, end [French ed., 24–25] (Veitch, 26–27). The Latin *Cogito, ergo sum* renders what first found expression in the French “*Je pense, donc je suis.*” In *Principles of Philosophy*, principle VII, Descartes explains that while it is easy enough to doubt and imagine as false things as diverse as other bodies or God’s existence, “we cannot in the same way conceive that we who doubt these things are not; for there is a contradiction in conceiving that what thinks does not at the same time as it thinks, exist.” (Translation of this latter quote from *Philosophical Works*, vol. 1, 221).

²⁸⁸ Descartes, *Discourse*, Part IV, para. 3, end [French ed., 25] (Veitch, 26). The portion of Veitch’s translation “very clearly and distinctly” renders the French *fort clairement et fort distinctement*.

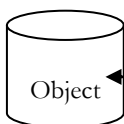
²⁸⁹ Lat. *res extensa* = “things outside”; *res cogitans* = “things thought.”

On the foundation of this central certainty he then, by his method, begins to build his philosophical dualism.

As he does so, Descartes argues that the reason so many people have difficulty accepting the truth of something like God's existence lies in their faulty thinking, which has been conditioned such that "they never rise their minds beyond sensible things, and they are so accustomed to considering nothing but by imagining it—which is a way of thinking particular for material things—that all that is not imaginable seems to them to be unintelligible."²⁹⁰

But by employing his criterion, he argues, one may achieve a clear and certain knowledge. We now have enough to render a better picture:

¹Criterion: Things must be so very clearly and distinctly conceived as to be certain.

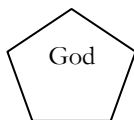


²Ordinary thinking:

Things perceived by the senses are also imagined in the mind.

They do not meet the criterion.

All such things can be doubted.



⁶Knowledge of God
(*clear and certain*)

⁵Rigorous Reasoning

⁴"Cogito, ergo sum."
(Meets the criterion.)

³Exercise of Systematic doubting

²⁹⁰ Descartes, *Discourse*, Part IV, para. 6 (Veitch, 30). "Sensible things" renders the French *des choses sensibles*.

The use of human imagination leads, for example, to anthropomorphizing God (i.e., comprehending the idea of God only by drawing on sensible images).

The Results

A few years later, in his 1637 *Meditations on the First Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes, as the full title promises, sets out to provide a demonstration of God's existence and of the immortality of the soul.²⁹¹ In doing so he takes full advantage of Aquinas' division, writing:

[A]lthough it is quite true that the existence of God is to be believed since it is taught in the sacred Scriptures, and that, on the other hand, the sacred Scriptures are to be believed because they come from God (for since faith is a gift of God, the same Being who bestows grace to enable us to believe other things, can likewise impart of it to enable us to believe his own existence), nevertheless, this cannot be submitted to infidels, who would consider that the reasoning proceeded in a circle.²⁹²

In such manner he accomplishes two things: he neatly removes himself from dependence on revelation and is then able to proceed on the basis of reason. His justification—presenting an evangelistic apologetics to unbelievers—is one that *prima facie* can hardly be disputed!

Descartes self-consciously stays to the path of reason, leaving to the Catholic Church the path through faith dependent on God's revelation. Of course, he runs the risk of becoming subject to the kind of criticisms that Peter Abelard had faced. But the times are more favorable in the 17th century than they were in the

²⁹¹ The full title is *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia in qua Dei Existentia et Animae Immortalitas Demonstrantur*.

²⁹² Descartes, *First Principles*, Dedication (Veitch trans., *Discourse*, 65).

12th century. Aquinas' split between reason and revelation has left for Descartes the ability to defend himself by maintaining a sharp distinction between knowledge and belief. In a 1641 letter he pointedly says, "I never used the word 'believe' when the topic was knowledge." In fact, he immediately clarifies his stance:

In the reply to the Second Objections I said 'when we are supernaturally illumined by God, we are confident that what is put forward for us to believe has been revealed by God himself'; but there I was speaking not of human knowledge, but of faith. And I did not assert that by the light of grace we clearly know the very mysteries of faith—though I would not deny that this too may happen—but only that we are confident that they are to be believed. No one who really has the Catholic Faith can doubt or be surprised that it is most evident that what God has revealed is to be believed and that the light of grace is to be preferred to the light of nature.²⁹³

Descartes is astute enough to see that his claims must not cross certain lines. The mysteries of faith remain matters decided by the Church, whose authority is final with respect to articulating knowledge derived from revelation. Reason, he argues, does not threaten revelation. He strives to show that the paths of revelation and reason address different sets of questions and that the only real problem is when one path is attempted to be used for a set of questions improper to it.

²⁹³ Descartes, Letter to Hyperaspistes (Aug., 1641) (translation from *Philosophical Writings*, vol. III, 191). On the trustworthiness of God's revelation, see, for example, Descartes' *Reply to Objections VI*, point #5.

Thus much I will say: Here one must distinguish between three types of questions. Certain things are believed through faith alone. Such are the mystery of the Incarnation, the Trinity, and the like. Others, however, though they have a certain bearing on faith, can nevertheless be investigated by the natural reason. Among these are generally ranked by the orthodox theologians the existence of God, and the distinction of mind from body. Finally, there are others which belong in no wise to the sphere of faith, but only to the sphere of human reason, e.g. the question of the squaring of the circle or of making gold by the art of alchemy. . . . For as we were born men before we became Christians, it is beyond belief that any man should seriously embrace opinions which he thinks contrary to that right reason that constitutes a man, in order that he may cling to the faith through which he is a Christian.²⁹⁴

Descartes presumes compatibility between Aquinas' two paths, then uses it to expand the reach of reason. In effect, while the mysteries of the faith belong to the path of revelation, everything else belongs to reason—and even the mysteries can be probed by reason; he only admits that answers cannot be sought by reason *alone*, and then affirms that whatever answers to such mysteries are found will not be incompatible with natural reason. In fact, he ends with a ringing declaration that 'right reason' and faith are so in harmony that one cannot embrace the latter without the former.

What makes Descartes such a decisive influence is two things. First, he focuses on *how* knowledge may be achieved and devises a rational test. Second, his first

²⁹⁴ Descartes, *Notes Directed Against a Certain Programme*, Notes to the fourth article (Translation from *Philosophical Works*, vol. I, 438–39).

principle is less a foundation upon which to build a system than one upon which to form a *method*.

Chapter 10

British Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume)

Part of Descartes' justification for championing reason lies in presuming sense-perception is always doubtful. Descartes, treading carefully, is measured in his criticism of Aristotle. He can be read as embarking on a program intending to surpass Aristotle along Augustinian lines.²⁹⁵ With Descartes, and figures such as Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) and Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716), we can properly speak of philosophical *rationalism*. It comes to dominate epistemology on the European continent.

During this period Aristotle still retains his influence, even among those not primarily concerned with preserving a certain kind of theology. Philosophical *empiricism*, championing sense-perception as vigorously as rationalists did reason, also emerges with force in the 17th–18th centuries. While the Continent was embracing rationalism, across the Channel formed a group known today as the British Empiricists.²⁹⁶ They include John

²⁹⁵ This is exactly the contention of Menn, *Descartes and Augustine*, ix. For a possible hint of Descartes' own thoughts, see *Discourse*, VI, paragraph 6.

²⁹⁶ For a detailed study on the relation of Aristotelianism and British Empiricism, see Sgarbi, *Aristotelian Tradition*.

Locke and George Berkeley, but most especially David Hume.

The British Empiricists, like Descartes, focus on the question of *how* we know. But they differ from Descartes in seeking to answer that question by looking at what people actually *use* in seeking knowledge. For empiricists the answer is obvious: people start with sense-perception. It is epistemology's foundation and its most basic tool in seeking knowledge.

Locke on Knowledge vs. Belief

John Locke (1632–1704) makes his famous contribution to epistemology in his lengthy *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1689). In his opening ‘Letter to the Reader’ he introduces his subject in a manner reminiscent of the spirit of Aristotle:

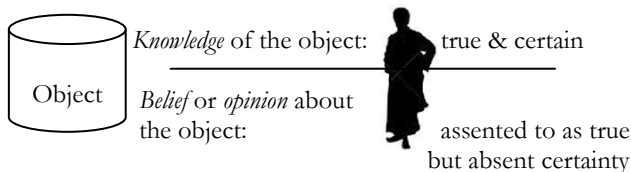
[H]e is little acquainted with the subject of this treatise, the UNDERSTANDING, who does not know, that as it is the most elevated faculty of the soul, so it is employed with a greater and more constant delight than any of the other. Its searches after truth are a sort of hawking and hunting, wherein the very pursuit makes a great part of the pleasure. Every step the mind takes in its progress toward Knowledge, makes some discovery, which is not only new, but the best too, for the time at least.²⁹⁷

Locke’s “understanding” is the human faculty most closely related to the discernment of truth, which remains as it was for the Greek philosophers of old about the very nature of reality. He writes in his introduction that it is the understanding “that sets man above the

²⁹⁷ Locke, *Essay*, “Letter to the Reader” (Fraser’s edition, vol. I, 7–8).

rest of sensible beings.”²⁹⁸ He then specifies that undertaking an essay on human understanding means that his purpose is to inquire into the “original, certainty, and extent of *human knowledge*.” But like others before him he recognizes this also means examining “the grounds and degrees of *belief, opinion, and, assent*.”²⁹⁹ His connection of the term “certainty” with knowledge signals a chief difference between knowledge, on one side, and belief, opinion and assent on the other, all of which lack such certainty.

We have an initial picture like this:



Locke sees that his interest entails marking out the boundary separating knowledge from belief. He thus announces his method to have three steps:

1. To examine the origin of ideas and how they come about;
2. To indicate the knowledge thus produced and its certainty, evidence and extent; and
3. To consider the nature of belief and opinion with respect to assent.³⁰⁰

Critique of Rationalism

²⁹⁸ Locke, *Essay*, Introduction, 1 (beginning) (Fraser, I, 25).

²⁹⁹ Locke, *Essay*, Introduction, 2 (Fraser, I, 26). “Original” is a little unclear, but means generally what “origin” does (see II.24).

³⁰⁰ Locke, *Essay*, Introduction, 3 (Fraser, I, 27–8).

Immediately, he disputes the rationalists' conviction of innate (*a priori*) ideas, offering up a series of objections. He points out, to start, that even if it can be shown that every person assents to a particular idea as true it might be possible to show this agreement arises from something other than 'innateness.' But there seems little need to do so because in simple fact there are no ideas that appear to have won universal assent! Many ideas elude the grasp of people because of their immaturity or their lack of intelligence. He observes, too, that those who appeal to reason as necessary to uncover supposed innate ideas end up arguing thus:

So that to make reason discover those truths thus imprinted, is to say, that the use of reason discovers to a man what he knew before: and if men have those innate impressed truths originally, and before the use of reason, and yet are always ignorant of them till they come to the use of reason, it is in effect to say, that men know and know them not at the same time.³⁰¹

If the rationalist position is flawed, what is better?

Perception & Ideas

Locke's answer is framed from the start in a way at once simple and appealing:

³⁰¹ Locke, *Essay*, I.1.3–9 (Fraser, I, 39–43). The quote is from p. 43. This is just part of an extended section (Book I of the *Essay*) pointing out problems in rationalist thinking. The point made here should bring to mind the position of Plato but really addresses the very early and persistent epistemological concern over what *is* and *is not*. At the start of this extended discussion he refers to these innate ideas as being what is in mind with the Greek κοινὰ ἔννοια (*koinai ennoiai*), "common notions." The phrase has stock in both the traditions of Aristotle and of the Stoics.

For I imagine any one will easily grant that it would be impertinent to suppose the ideas of colours innate in a creature whom God hath given sight, and a power to receive them by the eyes from external objects: and no less unreasonable would it be to attribute several truths to the impressions of nature, and innate characters, when we may observe in ourselves faculties fit to attain as easy and certain knowledge of them as if they were originally imprinted on the mind.³⁰²

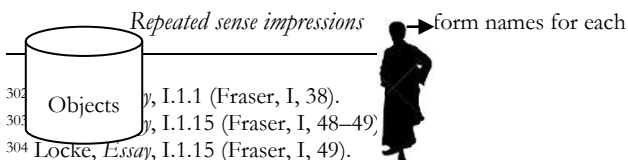
In short, the human senses are where one must start.

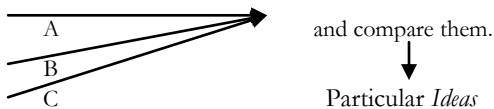
Locke is most famous for his idea that the mind begins as a *tabula rasa*, a Latin expression ordinarily translated as “blank slate.” He early introduces the notion when he argues, “The senses at first let in *particular* ideas, and furnish the yet empty cabinet, and the mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them, they are lodged in the memory, and names got to them.”³⁰³

So, rather than innate, ideas are *acquired*. They are *a posteriori*, ‘after experience.’ Even our earliest true ideas—our first knowledge—is acquired.

For, if we will observe, we shall find it still to be about ideas, not innate, but acquired; it being about those first which are imprinted by external things, with which infants have earliest to do, which make the most frequent impressions on their senses. In ideas thus got, the mind discovers that some agree and others differ, probably as soon as it has any use of memory; as soon as it is able to retain and perceive distinct ideas.³⁰⁴

We now have a more elaborate picture:





Locke focuses upon *ideas* in Book II of his *Essay*. He again asserts, “Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, devoid of all characters, without any ideas:—How comes it to be furnished?” His answer seems simple enough—*experience*—but what he intends by that term has been the source of a great deal of debate and controversy. He claims it is both the foundation of knowledge and its source. His initial effort to elaborate on what he means is this:

Our observation employed either, about external objects, or about the internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understanding with all the *materials* of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge from which all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring.³⁰⁵

These two ‘fountains’ are, in Locke’s terms:

1. *sensation*—perceptions conveyed by the senses; and
2. *reflection*—“the perception of the operations of our own mind within us, as it is employed about the ideas it has got.”

He then offers a number of terms to clarify what he means: “*perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing*, and all the different actings of our own minds. . . .” It is an internal sense which differs from the sense of external objects (sensation), and so he

³⁰⁵ Locke, *Essay*, II.1.2 (Fraser, I, 121–22). 1st quote, 121, 2nd, 122.

adopts the word “reflection” to capture the essence of what today psychologists call metacognition.³⁰⁶

Ideas: Simple & Complex

Locke’s twin fountains disclose ideas as being of two kinds:

1. *simple* (resulting from either sensation or reflection, e.g., the smell of a rose), and
2. *complex* (combining simple ideas).

“When the understanding is once stored with these simple ideas,” Locke writes, “it has the power to repeat, compare, and unite them, even to an almost infinite variety, and so can make at pleasure new complex ideas.”³⁰⁷ Locke then suggests the mind has three principal ways to exert power over simple ideas:

1. Combining simple ideas into a compound one;
2. Considering two ideas (whether simple or complex) together to see how they relate; and
3. Abstracting them to form *general* ideas.³⁰⁸

He spends considerable time working out the implications of simple and complex ideas and their relations.

Late in Book II he turns attention to other matters commonly associated with knowledge. He notes that ideas can also be differentiated as follows:

³⁰⁶ Locke, *Essay*, II.I.3–4 (Fraser, I, 122–24). The quote is from II.1.4 (Fraser, 123). On “perception” see II.9.2: “What perception is, every one will know better by reflecting on what he does himself, when he sees, hears, feels, &c., or thinks, than by any discourse of mine.”

³⁰⁷ Locke, *Essay*, II.2.1–3 (Fraser, I, 144–47). The quote is from II.2.2 (Fraser, I, 145). On complex ideas, see II.12.

³⁰⁸ Locke, *Essay*, II.12.1 (Fraser, I, 213–14).

1. *clear* or *obscure*,
2. *distinct* or *confused*,
3. *real* or *fantastical*,
4. *adequate* or *inadequate*, and,
5. *true* or *false*.³⁰⁹

The first items in each pair are often named as characteristics of knowledge and the latter ones as of belief. On the last pair, Locke notes that properly speaking, the idea of 'true' or 'false' applies only to propositions. He comments, "For our ideas, being nothing but bare *appearances*, or perceptions in our minds, cannot properly and simply in themselves be said to be true or false. . . ." However, once ideas are referred to external things, then they can be judged as true or false.³¹⁰

Knowledge

Finally, in Book IV, Locke turns full attention to the matter of knowledge. He begins by arguing, "Since the mind, in all its thoughts and reasonings, hath no other immediate object but its own ideas, which it alone does or can contemplate, it is evident that our knowledge is only conversant about them."³¹¹ This immediately leads to his definition of knowledge:

Knowledge then seems to me to be nothing but *the perception of the connexion of an agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas*. In this alone does it consist. Where this perception is, there is knowledge, and where

³⁰⁹ Locke, *Essay*, II.29.1–2 (Fraser, 486–7) for #1–2; II.30.1 (Fraser, I, 497) for #3–5 (Fraser, I, 514).

³¹⁰ Locke, *Essay*, II.30.1–4 (Fraser, I, 514–15). Quote is from II.30.1 (Fraser, I, 514). See II.30.2 on the metaphysical relation.

³¹¹ Locke, *Essay*, IV.1.1 (Fraser, II, 167).

it is not, there, though we may fancy, guess, or believe, yet we always come short of knowledge.³¹²

Locke's formulation may remind one of Protagoras, who also defines knowledge as perception. But Locke varies significantly from Protagoras. First, Locke seeks objective knowledge, where Protagoras is content with subjective knowledge. Second, Locke explicitly makes "perception" about both sensation and reflection, affording the latter a greater role than Socrates believes pertains to Protagoras. Finally, where Protagoras ultimately makes knowledge equal to belief, Locke is adamant that never are these the same.

For Locke, *knowledge is the perception of agreement or disagreement among ideas*. When we "know" something we perceive one or another of four kinds of relation:

1. *Identity*, or *diversity*—i.e., each idea is uniquely itself and not another; different ideas exist.
2. *Relation*—i.e., how ideas different from one another relate to each other.
3. *Co-existence*, or *necessary connection*—i.e., whether particular ideas coexist or not in the same object (e.g., the coexisting ideas of qualities in gold, such as its color and weight.)
4. *Real existence*—i.e., ideas correlate to actual reality; they are merely individual imaginings.³¹³

³¹² Locke, *Essay*, IV.1.2 (Fraser, II, 167–8).

³¹³ Locke, *Essay*, IV.1.3–7 (Fraser, II, 168–72). On the first point, Locke argues one may disagree about the *name* of an idea, over which some doubt may exist, but the idea remains fixed and certain. On the second point he says all positive knowledge depends on our ability to discern relations between ideas. On the third point he has

Locke produces an equation like this:

$$\text{Perception} = \text{Knowledge} = \text{Truth}$$

Where “perception” is divided into sensation and reflection, “knowledge” is divided into two kinds, each distinguished by the way truth possesses the mind. The first is *actual knowledge*, “the present view the mind has of the agreement or disagreement of any of its ideas, or of the relation they have one to another.” The second is *habitual knowledge*, “all those truths which are lodged in his memory, by a foregoing clear and full perception, whereof the mind is assured past doubt as often as it has occasion to reflect on them.”³¹⁴

Locke may disagree with Descartes that reason has the ability to discern *a priori* truths, but he quite concurs that knowledge is characterized by clarity and certainty. The clearest and most certain knowledge, knowledge in the highest degree, is *intuition*—“the mind perceives the agreement or disagreement of two ideas *immediately by themselves*, without the intervention of any other.”³¹⁵ The clarity and certainty are immediate and compelling. Locke writes emphatically, “*It is on this intuition that depends all our certainty and evidence of all our knowledge.*”³¹⁶

If intuitive knowledge is the highest degree of knowledge, below it ranks *demonstration*. It lacks the immediacy of intuition and instead depends on the intervention of other ideas and the process of reasoning. The intervening ideas serve to demonstrate the agree-

substances especially in mind (as the example shows). The last point secures objectivity and prevents solipsism.

³¹⁴ Locke, *Essay*, IV.1.8.I–II (Fraser, II, 172).

³¹⁵ Locke, *Essay*, IV.2.1 (Fraser, II, 176).

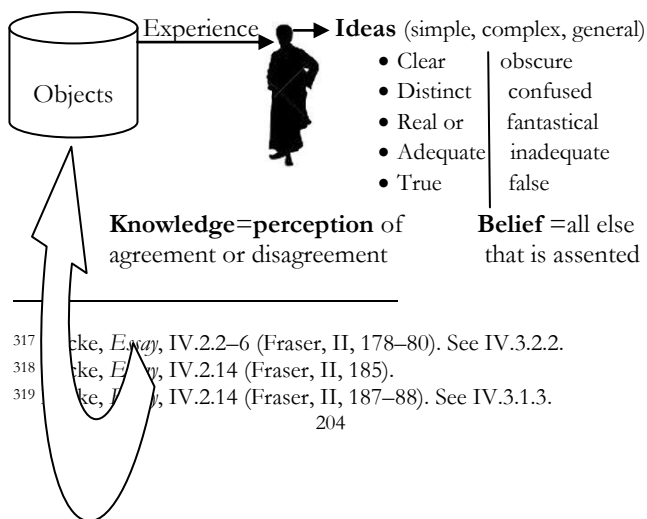
³¹⁶ Locke, *Essay*, IV.2.1 (Fraser, II, 177).

ment between ideas and are called “proofs.” The result is that the mind, having been shown the truth, accepts it. The knowledge resulting is certain even if not as clear as with intuition. However, it is important to note that prior to the intervention of proofs, doubt existed, which never happens in intuition.³¹⁷

Locke finds himself again at the boundary between knowledge and belief. He writes, “These two, viz. intuition and demonstration, are the degrees of our *knowledge*; whatsoever comes short of one of these, with what assurance soever embraced, is but *faith* or *opinion*, but not knowledge, at least in all general truths.”³¹⁸

But—and it is a significant *But*—there is a degree of knowing that falls short of the certainty spoken of above yet exceeds “bare probability” and so it is sufficiently certain to warrant being called knowledge. It concerns the particular existence of things outside ourselves, an existence confirmed by virtue of actual sense experience of real external objects. Locke terms this *sensitive* (or *sensative*) knowing.³¹⁹

We may put Locke’s epistemology in view like this:



³¹⁷ Locke, *Essay*, IV.2.2–6 (Fraser, II, 178–80). See IV.3.2.2.

³¹⁸ Locke, *Essay*, IV.2.14 (Fraser, II, 185).

³¹⁹ Locke, *Essay*, IV.2.14 (Fraser, II, 187–88). See IV.3.1.3.

among ideas= **Truth**

as true.

Degrees of knowing:

Most certain and clear

- Intuitive (immediate, clear & certain)
- Demonstrative (needs proofs)
- Sensitive (sense experience of real objects)

Less certain and clear

George Berkeley's Idealism

Locke's emphasis on ideas as central to knowledge led to dramatically different responses. First, George Berkeley (1685–1753) presents a curious example of a philosopher who generally baffled his contemporaries, is largely not followed by others, and yet significantly influenced two subsequent giants: David Hume and Immanuel Kant. An Anglican Bishop, Berkeley's religious convictions strongly motivate his philosophical thinking. With respect to epistemology his two great works are his *Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710) and the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713).³²⁰

Berkeley is an avowed enemy of Skepticism who takes both the views of Descartes and Locke to task. Indeed, he generally finds philosophers wanting and instead champions what he regards as the common sense view of ordinary people, who are baffled by the 'difficulties' philosophers profess to find (making him, in his own way, a bit like Isocrates). In his *Principles* Berkeley begins by complaining that "no sooner do we depart from sense and instinct to follow the light of a superior principle—to reason, meditate, and reflect on the nature of things, but a thousand scruples spring up in our minds concerning those things which before we seemed fully to comprehend."³²¹

³²⁰ For a substantial treatment of Berkeley's view, see Dicker, *Berkeley's Idealism*.

³²¹ Berkeley, *Principles*, Introduction, 1 (Fraser, vol. I of *Works of George Berkeley*, 137; hereafter Fraser, *Berkeley*).

Rather than presume, as philosophers do, that the problem lies in us as a matter of some inherent deficiency, Berkeley argues:

But, perhaps, we may be too partial to ourselves in placing the fault originally in our faculties, and not rather in the wrong use we make of them. . . . We should believe that God has dealt more bountifully with the sons of men than to give them a strong desire for that knowledge which he has placed quite out of their reach.³²²

Berkeley is confident in human perceptual abilities. Like Locke, he views the objects of knowledge as “either ideas actually imprinted on the senses; or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind; or lastly, ideas formed by help of memory and imagination”³²³—in other words, his scheme is like Locke’s about simple and complex ideas.

But he views Locke as not having gone far enough. He argues that if ideas are dependent on the existence of a mind, then, “to me it is no less evident that the various sensations or ideas imprinted on the sense, however blended or combined together . . . cannot exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving them.”³²⁴

Berkeley adopts an extreme form of empiricism that has come to be known by the labels *idealism* and *immaterialism*. Both refer to his conclusion that all that can be known as real are *ideas* (rather than matter), a view caught by his own famous Latin phrase: *esse est percipi*, “to be is to be perceived.” Berkeley writes:

³²² Berkeley, *Principles*, Introduction, 2–3 (Fraser, *Berkeley*, 137–38); the quote is from p. 138.

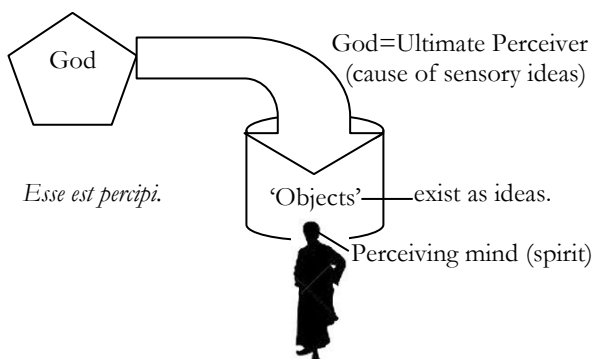
³²³ Berkeley, *Principles*, Part I, 1 (Fraser, *Berkeley*, 155).

³²⁴ Berkeley, *Principles*, Part I, 3 (Fraser, *Berkeley*, 156).

For as to what is to be said of the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived, that is to me perfectly unintelligible. Their *esse* is *percipi*, nor is it possible they should have any existence out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them.³²⁵

Berkeley's view of his position is that it alone both squares with common sense and avoids the mess that produces skepticism and atheism. He contends that "God is known as certainly and immediately as any other mind or spirit whatsoever distinct from ourselves."³²⁶ Further, God "is intimately present to our minds, producing in them all that variety of ideas or sensations which continually affect us. . . ."³²⁷

Berkeley's basic position may be sketched like this:



³²⁵ Berkeley, *Principles*, Part I, 3 (Fraser, *Berkeley*, 157).

³²⁶ Berkeley, *Principles*, Part I, 147 (Fraser, *Berkeley*, 232).

³²⁷ Berkeley, *Principles*, Part I, 149 (Fraser, *Berkeley*, 234).

David Hume: Skeptic Empiricist

David Hume (1711–1776) presents a different and more successful response to Locke. Whereas Berkeley aims to present an empiricism that refutes Skepticism, Hume—deeply influenced by the ancient Skeptics—finds in empiricism confirmation of their doubts about the possibility of achieving a certainty in knowledge. His greatest work in epistemology is his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), which he followed about a decade later with a work entitled *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748), meant to appeal to a broader audience.

At the start of his *Treatise*, Hume notes a situation much like that described by Sextus Empiricus many centuries earlier. He remarks that no profundity of knowledge is needed “to discover the present imperfect condition of the sciences, but even the rabble without doors may judge from the noise and clamour which they hear, that all goes not well within.”³²⁸ With everything being debated and contrary opinions everywhere, Hume repeats a sentiment offered more than a millennium earlier by Democritus, that “if truth be at all within the reach of human capacity, it is certain it must lie very deep and abstruse. . . .”³²⁹

³²⁸ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Introduction (EL, I, 3). ‘T’ refers to volume; ‘EL, 3’ to page number in Everyman’s Library ed. Hume’s Book I is in EL vol. I; Hume’s Books II–III are in EL vol. II. In citations for parts and sections Roman numerals are changed to Arabic.

³²⁹ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Introduction (EL, I, 4). On Hume’s Skepticism, including the question whether he was more aligned with Pyrrhonism or Academic Skepticism, see Russell, *Riddle of Hume’s Treatise*. For an older, still influential view, see Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*.

In his *Enquiry*, Hume very early sets forth his general position along skeptical lines:

Man is a reasonable being; and as such, receives from science his proper food and nourishment: But so narrow are the bounds of human understanding, that little satisfaction can be hoped for in this particular, either from the extent or security of his acquisitions.³³⁰

The best one can do is an investigation of *experience*.

Empiricism

What people might be able to know—and what Hume thinks pertains to every science, art and philosophical school—is constrained by one fact: “None of them can go beyond experience, or establish any principles which are not founded on that authority.”³³¹

Hume formally opens his *Treatise* in Part I with some of the most famous lines of modern philosophy:

All the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call *impressions* and *ideas*. The difference betwixt these consists in the degrees of force and liveliness, with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness.³³²

Impressions (which include sensations, passions and emotions) are more forceful than ideas (which are images of impressions in thinking and reasoning).

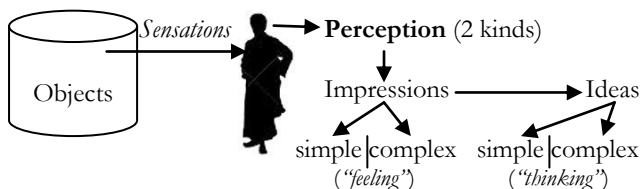
Like Locke, Hume starts with the presumption that objects in the world generate upon the mind sensations, which the mind’s perception divides into impressions

³³⁰ Hume, *Enquiry*, Section I (EL, I, 4–5).

³³¹ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Introduction (EL, I, 7).

³³² Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 1, §1 (beginning) (EL, I, 11). Hume’s so-called ‘fork’ separates reason and sense-perception.

and ideas (in memory and imagination)—both of which may be “simple” or “complex”—with ideas ultimately dependent, via impressions, upon original sensations.³³³ We accordingly begin with this basic picture:



Impressions reflect the original human experience of the sensory object (including passion and emotion as well as sensation), while ideas arise secondarily from such experience (as the product of memory or of imagination). The connection of ideas to impressions keeps his epistemology grounded in a connection to the real world because ideas are more than imagination.

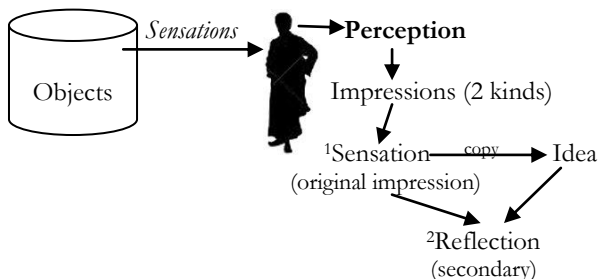
Hume insists “all the perceptions of the mind are double, and appear both as impressions and ideas.”³³⁴ But the distinction between simple and complex keeps one from mistakenly presuming that impressions and ideas always correspond to one another. Instead, Hume says, it is generally (not always) the case a resemblance exists between complex impressions and ideas, but it is always the case a strong resemblance pertains between simple ideas and the impressions to which they correspond, and vice versa.³³⁵

³³³ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 1, §1, para. 2 (EL, I, 12).

³³⁴ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 1, §1, para. 3 (EL, I, 12). “Ideas,” he says (EL, 16), “are images of our impressions.”

³³⁵ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 1, §1 (EL, I, 13–16). Hume briefly discusses the possibility of an idea arising *before* the impression it resembles.

Hume divides impressions into two kinds: *sensations* and *reflections*. The latter are secondary impressions that derive from a process that looks like this:



In Book I of the *Treatise* Hume explains the ordering of this process as: first an impression strikes upon the senses; second, a copy of that impression forms an idea (which persists after the original impression ceases); the idea in turn produces a new impression, which is an ‘impression of reflection.’ In Book II he writes, “Secondary, or reflective impressions, are such as proceed from some of the original ones, either immediately, or by the interposition of its idea.”³³⁶

Though it is logical to examine impressions before the ideas that depend upon them, after a brief consideration of the matter Hume decides ideas must be treated first, in part because “the impressions of reflection, viz. passions, desires, and emotions, which principally deserve our attention, arise mostly from ideas”³³⁷

³³⁶ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 1, §2 (EL, I, 16–17) and II, Pt. I, §1 (EL, II, 3). In the latter place Hume distinguishes primary impressions from secondary ones; primary = sensations and secondary = reflections.

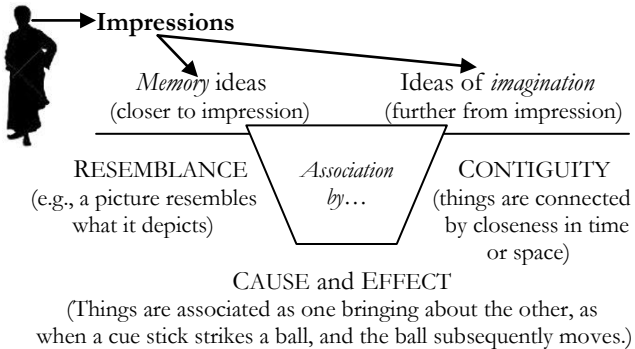
³³⁷ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 1, §2 (EL, I, 16–17); quote from p. 17.

Ideas, like impressions, are of two kinds:

1. ideas of *memory* (closer to the original impression and more forceful); and,
2. ideas of *imagination* (further from the original impression and free to change).³³⁸

Ideas are organized by certain universal principles. Hume quickly focuses on “a gentle force” which is “some associating quality, by which one idea naturally introduces another.” It is a “uniting principle.” Hume writes, “The qualities from which this association arises, and by which the mind is, after this manner, conveyed from one idea to another, are three, viz. *resemblance*, *contiguity* in time or place, and *cause* and *effect*.”³³⁹

It all looks like this:



Of these three, Hume singles out the last—cause and effect—as the most important.

³³⁸ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 1, §3 (EL, I, 17–19).

³³⁹ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 1, §4 (EL, I, 19).

Hume observes that inferring a cause from an effect requires us to establish the existence of the cause, which in turn demands either an appeal to some other cause, or an appeal to an immediate perception of the senses or memory. The former of these appeals can lead to an *ad infinitum* effort that inevitably ends only when we adopt the other appeal: some indubitable and unquestionable impression of memory or the senses must be behind every cause.³⁴⁰

Hume's wrestling with the notion of causation leads him to decide it is necessary to explain, in order, the original impression, the transition to the idea of the connected cause or effect, and finally, the nature and qualities of that idea. With respect to the first, he writes:

As to those *impressions*, which arise from the *senses*, their ultimate cause is, in my opinion, perfectly inexplicable by human reason, and it will always be impossible to decide with certainty, whether they arise immediately from the object, or are produced by the creative power of the mind, or are derived from the Author of our being.³⁴¹

The mind's inclination to infer causation derives from experience, because as a matter of known fact, "There is no object which implies the existence of any other, if we consider these objects in themselves, and never look beyond the ideas which we form of them." When we infer causation, Hume argues, we are presuming knowledge—i.e., that the matter can only be this way and no other; it is *certain*.³⁴²

³⁴⁰ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 3, §4 (EL, I, 85–86).

³⁴¹ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 3, §5 (EL, I, 86–87); quote is from p. 87.

³⁴² Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 3, §6 (EL, I, 89–90); quote is from p. 89.

Part III of the *Treatise*, which includes the materials on cause and effect examined above, is titled “Of Knowledge and Probability.” Its first section, “Of Knowledge,” is succinct but not as clear as one might like. If we add up all Hume says on the matter, when speaking of knowledge here he seems to have in mind *universal propositions that are both clear and certain* (i.e., they are judged to *must* be what they are and that they cannot be otherwise).

He asserts that there are only four philosophical relations “which depending solely upon ideas, can be the objects of knowledge and certainty”:

1. resemblance;
2. contrariety;
3. degrees in quality; and,
4. proportions in quantity or number.

The first three are so immediately obvious to the mind that they qualify as *intuition*. The fourth is less certain, as geometry demonstrates. Of the sciences, only arithmetic and algebra are such that “we can carry on a chain of reasoning to any degree of intricacy, and yet preserve a perfect exactness and certainty.”³⁴³

Geometry, though imperfectly precise, nevertheless “excels the imperfect judgments of our senses and imagination.” The essential problem with all ideas that we use in reasoning is that they are derivative in nature;

³⁴³ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 3, §1 (EL, I, 73–75); quotes from p. 74 & p. 75, respectively. On “relation” see I, Pt. 1, §5, where it means “any particular subject of comparison without a connecting principle.”

they all are copies of impressions.³⁴⁴ Thus, even though some ideas, those of the above four relations, may yield an immediate and convincing clarity that makes them intuitively certain—knowledge—it is evident that this provides a very limited field of things people *know*.

Most things belong to the *probable*, where three other relations prevail:

1. identity,
2. situations in time and place, and
3. causation.

Hume notes all kinds of reasoning involve nothing more than *comparison*, and when the objects being compared and their relation to one another are all present to the senses we don't call it "reasoning," but term it "perception." It isn't a matter of active thinking but "a mere passive admission of the impressions through the organs of sensation." Thus, the first two of the three relations ought not to be considered when we are talking about reasoning. That leaves only causation.³⁴⁵

And, as we have seen, causation is a matter of inference from experience—not from direct observation; causation is an idea, not an impression. People remember the association between certain things, drawing on memories of past experience to recall a constancy of association between an A (cause) and B (effect). Presuming a similar constancy in Nature, people infer that what has been the case in past experience will hold fast in the future. But this is not demonstrable. No way exists to prove that experiences people have not had resemble those they have had. Folk recognize changes

³⁴⁴ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 3, §1 (EL, I, 75); quote is from p. 75.

³⁴⁵ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 3, §2 (EL, I, 76–78); quote is from p. 77.

happen in Nature and so one cannot *a priori* rule out that an association between A and B always seen in individual past experience *must* always happen. Rather than certainty we only have probability, and “probability is founded on the presumption of a resemblance betwixt those objects of which we have had experience, and those of which we have had none. . . .”³⁴⁶ The end result is that the occurrence of an impression of B leads us to *believe* A is in attendance; “and consequently we may establish this as one part of the definition of an opinion or belief, that it is *an idea related to or associated with a present impression*.”³⁴⁷

Knowledge vs. Belief

Hume distinguishes “knowledge” from “probability” based on the degree of assurance or certainty. Both knowledge (as an ideal state of clarity and certainty), and “proofs,” are superior sources of reason to probability.³⁴⁸ After considering cause-and-effect, the nature of chance and probabilities, he declares:

Thus it appears, upon the whole, that every kind of opinion or judgment which amounts not to knowledge, is derived entirely from the force and vivacity of the perception, and that these qualities constitute in the mind what we call the *belief* of the existence of any object.³⁴⁹

A bit before Hume offers his conception of belief:

Thus it appears, that the *belief* or *assent*, which always attends the memory and senses, is nothing but the vivacity of those perceptions they present; and that this alone

³⁴⁶ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 3, §6 (EL, I, 89–96); quote is from p. 92.

³⁴⁷ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 3, §6 (EL, I, 89–96); quote is from p. 95.

³⁴⁸ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 3, §7 (EL, I, 96–100).

³⁴⁹ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 3, §13 (end) (EL, I, 152).

distinguishes them from the imagination. To believe is in this case to feel an immediate impression of the senses, or a repetition of that impression in the memory. It is merely the force and liveliness of the perception, which constitutes the first act of the judgment, and lays the foundation of that reasoning, which we build upon it, when we trace the relation of cause and effect.³⁵⁰

Hume is careful to explain that belief is not to be equated with imagination. People are fully capable of imagining an absurd idea (e.g., that Julius Caesar died in his sleep), so something must occur that resolves the question whether one believes whatever is asserted, or not. That ‘something’ is whatever tips us toward a side where we recognize more than one side exists; “until there appears some principle, which fixes one of these different situations, we have in reality no opinion.”³⁵¹

This means belief is a “lively” idea—i.e., one that exerts force. It exerts force in ways that reason cannot, utilizing custom or some principle of association. He regards “an opinion or belief” as an idea “that is different from a fiction, not in the nature, or order of its parts, but in the *manner* of its being conceived”—and that manner is a feeling. “An idea assented to *feels* different from a fictitious idea, that the fancy alone presents to us: and this different feeling I endeavor to explain by calling it a superior *force*, or *vivacity*, or *solidity*, or *firmness*, or *steadiness*.”³⁵²

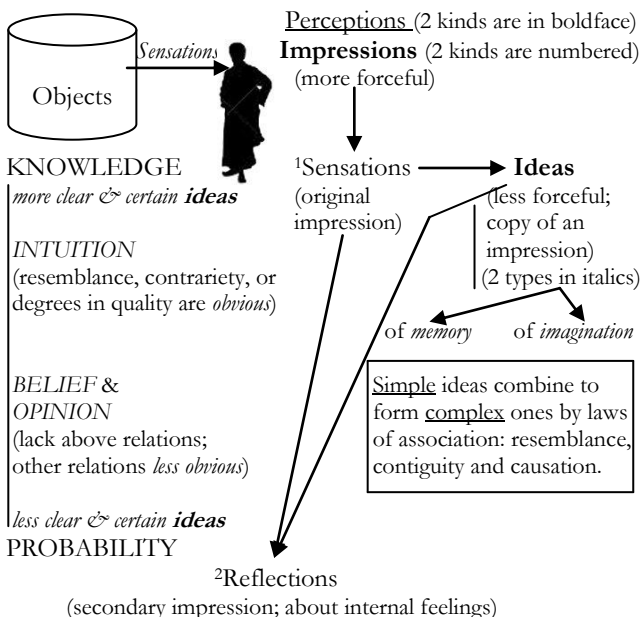
³⁵⁰ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 3, §5 (end) (EL, I, 89).

³⁵¹ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 3, §7: Of the Nature of the Idea or Belief (EL, I, 96–97; the quote is from p. 97). The example of Caesar is Hume’s own.

³⁵² Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 3, §7: Of the Nature of the Idea or Belief (EL, I, 99). Interestingly, Hume at I, Pt. 3, §5 (EL, 89)) had earlier

Belief is not, for Hume, an active force like reason; belief happens to us. Belief is a passive, reactive force. “And in philosophy,” he concludes, “we can go no further than to assert, that it is something *felt* by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgment from the fictions of the imagination.”³⁵³

When all of these matters are placed together Hume’s epistemology looks like this:



noted the role of custom or habit, which he said often has “the same influence on the mind as nature.”

³⁵³ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 3, §7: Of the Nature of the Idea or Belief (EL, I, 100). Philosopher Sandra Laugier, “Belief,” 97, observes that Hume’s depiction of belief as a feeling and judgment has remained a constant point of reference in philosophizing about belief.

If knowledge requires certainty, the scale on the left in the above illustration has little that may be claimed to meet it—and nothing derived from sense impressions. An idea can only be said to be *known* when it is so clear and evident as to be infallible—a matter of intuition needing neither inquiry nor reasoning. While algebra might supply such, ordinary experience does not. For everything else we are left with belief or opinion.

And, ultimately, even algebra and mathematics are suspect (from a Skeptic's perspective). Hume writes:

Our reason must be considered as a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect; but such a one as, by the irruption of other causes, and by the inconstancy of our mental powers, may frequently be prevented. By this means all knowledge degenerates into probability; and this probability is greater or less, according to our experience of the veracity or deceitfulness of our understanding, and according to the simplicity or intricacy of the question.

There is no algebraist nor mathematician so expert in his science, as to place entire confidence in any truth immediately upon his discovery of it, or regard it as anything but a mere probability.³⁵⁴

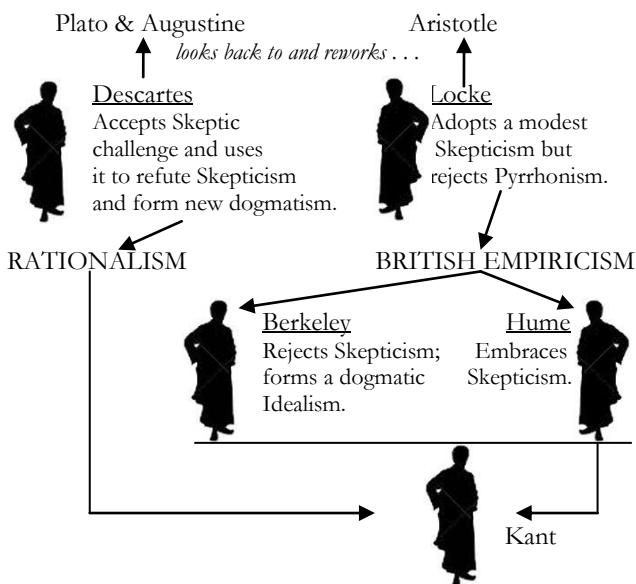
Knowledge, in its purest sense, pertaining to actual facts, eludes us and belief steps in instead. Reason is supplanted by feeling. Belief can resist the logical challenges knowledge must face; feeling is immune to logic in ways reason cannot be. Knowledge and belief differ in the nature of their *judgments*, yet human nature persists in making judgments of both kinds.

³⁵⁴ Hume, *Treatise*, I, Pt. 4, §1 (EL, I, 176).

Chapter 11

Kant's Revolutionary Synthesis

In the 18th century the two competing epistemologies we have just examined dominate. The spirit of Rationalism sweeps the Continent, despite being curiously out of sync with the scientific advancements attending the work of Galileo and others. In the British Isles Newton's scientific revolution induces the philosophical response of Empiricism. The scene looks like this:



Hume's epistemology rouses a fellow philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), from what the latter calls his 'dogmatic slumber.' Kant, living his entire life in a small Prussian town, inherits the dominant Rationalism of the Continent. But he finds that Rationalism wanting in light of the science of Newton, which is producing astonishing and practical results quite independent of any search for 'first principles.' At the same time, he is disquieted by Hume, whose empiricism undermines the very sense of cause and effect that science assumes in all its experimental work.

Kant devotes himself to developing a way between the moribund Rationalism around him and the skeptical Empiricism offered instead by Hume. He expresses his new understanding of knowledge in dense, often tortuously written, but profound treatises.³⁵⁵ First appears *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781)). Then, the year following a second edition of it, comes *Critique of Practical Reason* (*Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788)). Finally appears the last of his trilogy, *Critique of Judgment* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790)). These three volumes are the heart of his 'critical philosophy.'

In the Preface to his 1st edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant says when he uses the term "critique" (*Kritik*) he does not mean the kind of criticism scholars customarily provide of the books and systems they study. Instead, he is critiquing Reason itself to discover if this human faculty is able to produce *a priori* truths—

³⁵⁵ German translator Max Müller, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, xii, remarks, "It is difficult to translate the hymns of the Veda and the strains of the Upanishads, the odes of Pindar and the verses of Lucretius; but I doubt whether the difficulty of turning Kant's metaphysical German into intelligible and construable English is less."

truths not derived from a dependence on human experience.³⁵⁶ So his effort intends a thorough examination of reason, or more exactly, the faculty of *pure Reason*.³⁵⁷

Denying the creation of any new dogmatism, Kant confidently claims he has satisfactorily resolved doubts concerning Reason's power and thoroughly shown either the solution to every metaphysical problem or at least the key to such a solution.³⁵⁸ Having set out the subject matter he then turns to the form of his inquiry, which he declares must fulfill two conditions: "certainty" (*Gewissheit*) and "clarity" (*Deutlichkeit*)³⁵⁹—our two familiar qualities so often attached to knowledge.

³⁵⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to the First Edition, 6th para. (A xii). (Guyer and Wood, 101; Meiklejohn, xix). Scholars cite this work using A (1st ed.) and B (2nd ed.), with page number, as found in the *Akademie* edition of Kant's German works. I've added paragraph numbers for the Preface since most English translations follow the German paragraph divisions; this aids finding a text no matter the translation. Translations are noted by the translator's name and page number. The German text here (a single sentence broken into 9 clauses) yields a sense of the density in Kant's writing: *Ich verstehe aber hierunter nicht eine Kritik der Bücher und Systeme, sondern die des Vernunftvermögens überhaupt, in Ansehung aller Erkenntnisse, zu denen sie, unabhängig von aller Erfahrung, streben mag, mithin die Entscheidung der Möglichkeit oder Unmöglichkeit einer Metaphysik überhaupt und die Bestimmung sowohl der Quellen, als des Umfanges und der Grenzen derselben, alles aber aus Principien*. NB: I capitalize Reason to indicate it as a faculty of the mind (as I also do Sensibility and Understanding).

³⁵⁷ "Pure" = without sense experience. The distinction between *theoretical* and *practical* reason is handled later in this chapter.

³⁵⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to the First Edition, 7th para. (A xiii). (Guyer and Wood, 101; Meiklejohn, xix-xx).

³⁵⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to the First Edition, 10th para. (A xv). (Guyer and Wood, 102; Meiklejohn, xxi). Certainty is the subject of his next paragraph and clarity of his 13th para., where he refers to both logical ("discursive") and aesthetic ("intuitive") clarity.

To make matters perfectly clear that he is distinguishing this as being about knowledge, Kant in elaborating what he means by certainty immediately distinguishes it from mere “holding opinions” (*meinen*) or setting out “hypotheses” (*Hypothese*).³⁶⁰

Kant’s Copernican Revolution

Kant realizes that the quagmire present in the philosophy of his day results from the various epistemological camps either holding dogmatically to the position there is only one fundamental cognitive faculty (Reason or Sense-perception), or rejecting any faculty as sufficient and so embracing Skepticism. Neither path offers a way forward. Thus Kant, in trying to proceed in traditional philosophical manner, finds himself in a situation he likens to Copernicus: there is no way forward unless he changes his *frame of reference*.³⁶¹

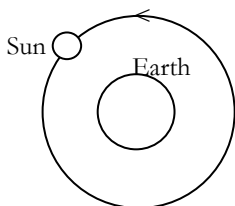
To better get at the dramatic change we might do well to try to picture what Kant does in terms of what Copernicus accomplished, since he sees his work as a similar fundamental shift. Copernicus revolutionized a view of the universe by suggesting that rather than conceive of it as revolving around earth—really meaning revolving around human beings—we instead should see ourselves on earth as part of a system revolving around the sun. It isn’t the *sun* that moves, but *human beings*. This simple shift in perspective did more than merely open up a new comprehension of the starry heavens; it changed the conception of humanity.

³⁶⁰ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to the First Edition, 11th para. (Guyer and Wood, 102; Meiklejohn, xxi).

³⁶¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to the Second Edition, 11th para. (B xvi) (Guyer and Wood, 110; Meiklejohn, xxix; Müller, 371).

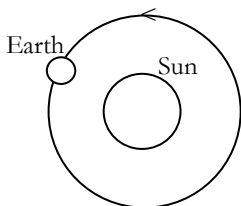
Let us place Kant's revolution alongside that of Copernicus in this illustration:

Before Copernicus



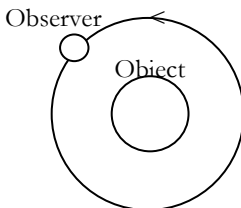
Geocentric Model:
Earth at the center; sun, moon
and stars revolve around it.

Copernicus' View



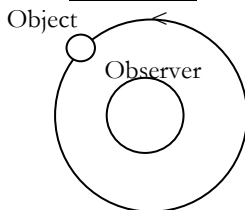
Heliocentric Model:
Sun at the center; earth and
planets revolve around it.

Before Kant



Traditional Philosophy:
Intuition has to conform to the
constitution of any real object.

Kant's View



Kant's Model:
Object must conform to the
constitution of human intuition.

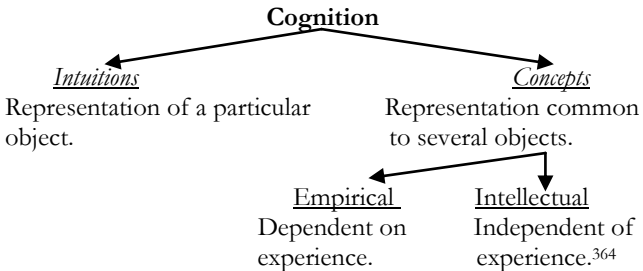
Today neither of these shifts seem remarkable, but that is because of the impact each has had. Changing perspective in epistemology means for Kant opening the door for legitimate claims for *a priori* knowledge.

If we reduce Kant's shift to its most basic nature, it is a move from primary dependence on the nature of the *object known* to the nature of the *knower*. Metaphysics, about the nature of objects (i.e., reality) must take second place—and depend upon—epistemology, which now is fundamentally about the Knower.

Cognition

In the illustration we see a term that has for Kant a technical meaning and an important place: *intuition*. To make sense of this word in Kant requires we first take a step back and consider human thinking more broadly.

Kant's conception of knowledge depends upon a foundation of "cognition" (*Erkenntnis*), broadly meaning how the mind engages in acts and processes to acquire knowledge. Kant refers to it as *perception of an objective nature*—a conscious effort to represent an object.³⁶² In the *Lectures on Logic* (*Jäsche Logic*) all cognitions are divided into either intuitions or conceptions (concepts), with a basic difference being that an intuition is a single representation and a concept a universal one (of either empirical or intellectual—"pure"—nature):³⁶³



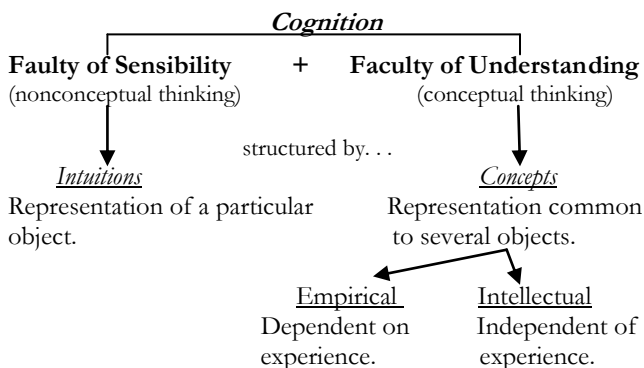
³⁶² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction. In *Lectures on Logic*, Part I, §1 cognitions are defined as "representations referred with consciousness to an object" (Richardson, 125; cf. Young, 589),

³⁶³ Kant, *Lectures on Logic*, Part I, §§1–3 (Richardson, 125–26; Young, 589–90).

³⁶⁴ Experience (*Erfahrung*) is a technical term in Kant. See his famous saying in *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction, §1 (B 1) (Guyer and Wood, 136; Meiklejohn, 16), "But if all cognition starts *with* experience, still it does not follow that all cognition rises *from* expe-

Both intuitions and concepts fit into a much larger framework. On one hand, cognition entails the faculty of “Sensibility” (*Sinnlichkeit*), which includes sense-perception and non-conceptual thinking such as found in intuition, and on the other hand it also involves the faculty of “Understanding” (*Verstand*) with its use of concepts. The former is how objects are given to the mind, while understanding yields thought.³⁶⁵

And so we must amend our previous picture:



We are not done with cognition, but let us revisit Kant’s ‘Copernican revolution.’ By shifting perspective to the Knower, he makes human cognition central. This means that instead of making “intuition” (*Anschauung*, the looking at an object immediately present³⁶⁶) depend on the object being considered, the

rience.” German: *Wenn aber gleich alle unsere Erkenntniss mit der Erfahrung anhebt, so entspringt sie darum doch nicht eben alle aus der Erfahrung.*

³⁶⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction, §7 (end) (Guyer and Wood, 152; Meiklejohn, 18).

³⁶⁶ See Hegeler, “What Does Anschauung Mean?” Cf. Falkenstein, “Kant’s Account of Intuition.”

object must be seen as conforming to our faculty of Sensibility.

Kant discovers by this change that the *concepts* fundamental to Understanding and the *intuitions* of Sensibility can both be accommodated. Knowledge is not just about *a priori* concepts, though that remains what he wants most and regards as most certain, but also about what is gained *a posteriori* (after experience). As he puts it in the Preface to his 2nd edition, “experience” (*Erfahrung*) is itself a kind of cognition.³⁶⁷

Elsewhere, Kant offers an expanded sense of the term. In the *Lectures on Logic* seven levels of “cognition” are set out in an ascending order as follows:³⁶⁸

Highest

7. Comprehension (Cognize via reason *a priori*; Lat. *comprehendere*)
6. Cognizing through Reason (Lat. *perscipere*)
5. Cognizing by concepts of Understanding (Lat. *intelligere*)
4. Acquaintance + Consciousness (Ger. *erkennen*; Lat. *cognoscere*)
3. Comparative perception (identity & distinction; Lat. *noscere*)
2. Conscious representation (perceiving; Lat. *percipere*)
1. Representation of something to oneself (Ger. *vorstellen*)

Lowest

³⁶⁷ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to the Second Edition, 11th para. (Guyer and Wood, 111; Meiklejohn, xxix; Müller, 371). Müller renders the term as “knowledge.” The German *Erkenntnis* (usually rendered as “cognition”) has a broader meaning than *Wissen*—the other key term often translated into English as “knowledge.” If one imagines a scale of knowledge, *Wissen* is higher, marked by a degree of certainty that *Erkenntnis* lacks. On the use and distinction of these terms in Kant, see Cicovacki, *Anamorphosis*, 45–46.

³⁶⁸ Kant, *Lectures on Logic*, Einleitung, §8 (end) (*Jäsche Logik*, Akademieausgabe, IX, 64–65) (Richardson, 89–90). See the brief summary in Watkins and Willaschek, “Kant’s Account of Cognition,” 86.

Of these we might call special attention to the fourth (German *etwas verstehen*, “to understand something” = Latin *cognoscere*, “to know”), which is qualified as inherently relative; we comprehend something by reason to a degree sufficient for the purpose at hand.³⁶⁹

But we need not become immersed in too much detail. The essential points are that cognitions:

1. are fundamental to Kant’s epistemology,
2. exist in robust degrees, and,
3. address both the particular (Sensibility’s intuitions) and general (Understanding’s concepts).

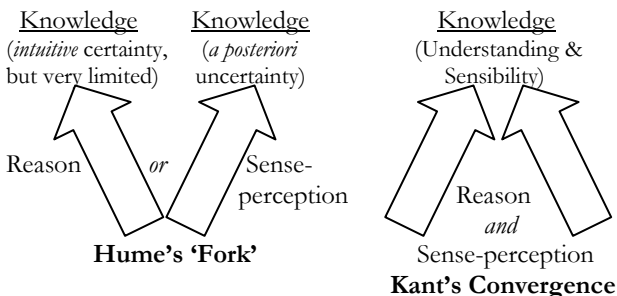
We shall content ourselves with noting that Kant’s thinking about cognitions is in a context concerned with solving the problem of whether and how human beings can achieve knowledge using Reason, with *a priori* concepts, or if they are constrained to the kind of difficulties Hume pointed out about sense experience and the ideas dependent upon them. In this endeavor distinguishing the nature and kinds of cognition is key. His answer is to reject any either-or between sense-perception and reason; cognition involves both.

Kant’s Answer to Hume

Kant’s answer to Hume is expressed in the Introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason* when he declares there are the *two sources of human cognition*, named above—Sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*) and Understanding (*Verstand*)—and these work cooperatively together. We shall return to each of these in a moment.

³⁶⁹ Watkins and Willaschek, “Kant’s Account of Cognition,” 86, note that by the labeling this one of the seven is singled out.

We may picture Kant's view of cognition in contrast to that presented by Hume's 'fork':



Cognition is not 'either-or' but 'both-and.'³⁷⁰

Knowledge: The Great Synthesis

Kant's revolutionary idea is that knowledge involves both *the thing being known* and *the mind of the knower imposing a priori structures upon those things*. It is a synthesis of both Reason and Sense-perception. This synthesis depends upon the operation of three mental factors:

1. the forms of intuition structuring the faculty of Sensibility;
2. the categories of concepts structuring the faculty of Understanding; and
3. the ideas structuring the faculty of Reason.

We already have briefly met the first two of these in the remarks on cognition. Now we must examine all three more closely.

³⁷⁰ There are more dimensions to the idea in Kant than can be covered here, and the whole matter remains one of some controversy. For one perspective, and an introductory orientation to the matter, see Watkins and Willaschek, "Kant's Account of Cognition."

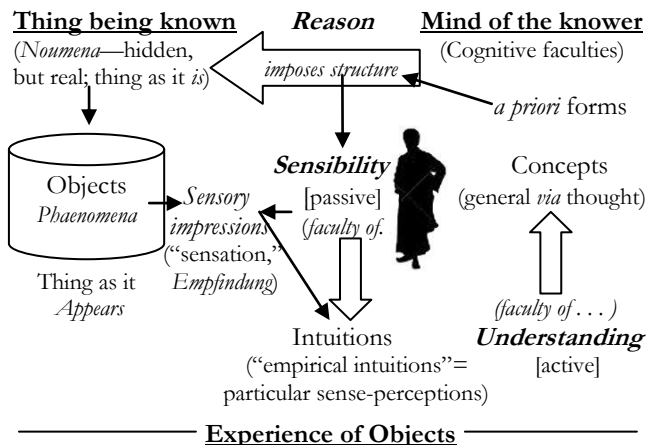
In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, upon which we depend most heavily here, Kant develops a theory of epistemology under the label “Transcendent” (*transcendental*). Although the term is used in a variety of ways, we will do well to think of it here as that which relates principally to how we know objects apart from experience, that is, *a priori*.³⁷¹ He then offers further specificity by adding terms to Transcendental like “Aesthetic” (*transscendentale Aesthetik*), so that, “A science of all principles of Sensibility *a priori* I name ‘the Transcendental Aesthetic.’”³⁷²

As we have seen, Kant provides his own vocabulary to describe things and he often uses terms in a technical manner (even if not always as consistently or precisely as we might like). While it can be easy to get lost among the thorny trees presented by such vocabulary, especially since it also involves going from his German to our English, we cannot grasp Kant very well unless we make some effort to master various key terms. An illustration may help.

³⁷¹ See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction, §7 (A 12/B 25) (Guyer and Wood, 149; Meiklejohn, 16), where he defines ‘Transcendental’ as having to do with modes of knowledge of objects insofar as possible *a priori*. Also see *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Logic, Part II (or Second Division): Transcendental Dialectic, Introduction, I: Transcendental Illusion (A 295–296/ B 352) (Guyer and Wood, 385; Meiklejohn, 210), on ‘transcendent’ vs. ‘immanent’ principles: the latter are confined to possible experience, while the former are not.

³⁷² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, Part I: Transcendental Aesthetic, Introduction (A 21/ B 36) (Guyer and Wood, 156; Meiklejohn, 22). German: *Eine Wissenschaft von allen Principien der Sinnlichkeit a priori nenne ich die transscendentale Aesthetik*.

We can picture the process of the relationship between an object and the human mind like this:



First, we must note that Kant’s solution—his great synthesis—comes with a price: with respect to real objects we cannot know the thing-in-itself (Latin *Noumena*, or German *Ding an sich*), but only the *a posteriori* thing-as-it-appears (*Phaenomena*). In ordinary English, Kant says we “know” reality only through our experience of it, an experience in which mental structures serve as filters, like wearing special lenses, so that objects are always and only seen through them.

Second, observe that while the faculty of Understanding exhibits some independence, both sources of cognition we considered earlier—Sensibility and Understanding—work together. Sensibility receives what is given from an object through sensation. But it does so only as constrained by the Understanding. Reason orchestrates everything, coordinating the cognitions into a system.

Let's try to deconstruct the picture we have drawn, beginning with how an object as-it-appears (*Phaenomena*) arouses sensation. An object gives itself via the senses to the Knower, but the reception of that via an empirical intuition is what is determinative. Sensory impressions are just that—impressions passively received as “sensations” (*Empfindung*). They provide raw data, but make no sense of it. For that one needs an “intuition” (*Anschauung*).

An intuition, in Kant's sense of the term, is an immediate recognition of an object as it appears.³⁷³ It is how an object is first related to by the human mind. Intuitions are of two kinds:

1. an *empirical* or *sensorial* intuition (*a posteriori*), and
2. *pure* intuitions (*a priori*)—those intuitions without sensation involved (“space” and “time”).

Intuitions belong to Sensibility.³⁷⁴

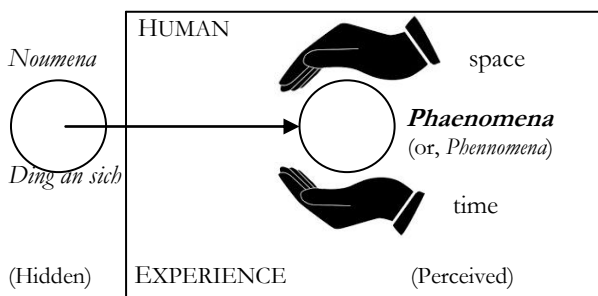
“Sensibility” (*Sinnlichkeit*) is the faculty of intuitions which cooperatively joins with the faculty of understanding (*Verstand*); these two sources partner to make knowing possible. Sensibility is typically seen as passive in character—at least when contrasted with understanding.³⁷⁵ Sensibility provides *a priori* forms of (i.e., pre-existing structural filters) applied to objects.

³⁷³ Hegeler, “What Does Anschauung Mean?” 530, recommends as an exact translation of *Anschauung*, “atsight,” which he explains is “the looking at an object in its immediate presence.”

³⁷⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Part I: Transcendental Aesthetic, §1 (Guyer and Wood, 155; Meiklejohn, 21).

³⁷⁵ Nuzzo, *Ideal Embodiment*, 2, notes, “For Kant, sensibility covers a complex territory broadly construed to include different functions

We might imagine the matter like this:



In sum, Sensibility provides intuitions, which immediately and consciously perceive an object as-it-appears with *a priori* forms of space and time imposed.³⁷⁶

Put simply, *a posteriori* knowledge entails *the external world received passively but actively interpreted*. An “empirical intuition,” Kant says in his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (*Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik*), is “*a posteriori* and empirically certain.”³⁷⁷ As he puts it in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, cognition—in whatever way or by whatever means—*always* with respect to an object

such as intuition, sensation, feeling, imagination, desires, affects, emotions, which both the empiricist and rationalist traditions had usually and variously conflated.” Nuzzo argues for an active element in sensibility. For a briefer introduction, see Carson, “Sensibility.”

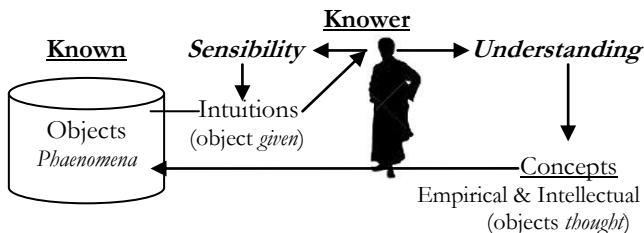
³⁷⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, Part I: Transcendental Aesthetic, §1 (end) (A 22/B 36): *dass es zwei reine Formen sinnlicher Anschauung, als Principien der Erkenntnis a priori gebe, nämlich Raum und Zeit*: “[T]here are two pure forms of sensorial intuition, as principles of cognition *a priori*, namely, space and time.” (Meiklejohn, 23, renders *Erkenntnis* as “knowledge.”)

³⁷⁷ Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysic*, Main Transcendental Question, Part I, §1 (Carus, 33; Hatfield, 33). German: *a posteriori und empirisch gewiß*.

happens through an intuition; it is through intuitions cognition immediately relates to objects.³⁷⁸

Faculty of Understanding

But this is only part of the story of knowing. In the same place Kant tells us that objects are *given* to us by Sensibility, but *thought* through Understanding, a higher faculty working independently.³⁷⁹ It looks like this:



The faculty of Understanding provides concepts (*Begriffe*), which unlike intuitions are general in nature. The value of the ‘object *thought*’ is that these *a priori* concepts provide immediate structure and rules by which objects can be judged. They are, as it were, pre-packaged forms fit for use in conjunction with intuit-

³⁷⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, Part I: Transcendental Aesthetic, §1 (beginning) (A 19/B33). (Guyer and Wood, 171; Meiklejohn, 21). German: *Auf welche Art und durch welche Mittel sich auch immer eine Erkenntniss auf Gegenstände beziehen mag, so ist doch diejenige, wodurch sie sich auf dieselben unmittelbar bezieht, und worauf alles Denken als Mittel abzielt, die Anschauung.*

³⁷⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, Part I: Transcendental Aesthetic, §1 (A 19/B 33 (end)). (Guyer and Wood, 172; Meiklejohn, 21). The German is one of Kant’s more famous sentences: *Vermittelst der Sinnlichkeit also werden uns Gegenstände gegeben, und sie allein liefert uns Anschauungen; durch den Verstand aber werden sie gedacht, und von ihm entspringen Begriffe.* For a brief introduction to Kant’s idea, see Heidemann, “Understanding.”

tions and designed to help us unify and synthesize experience. It is, in short, the faculty of *rules*.³⁸⁰

The Understanding provides unifying structure to the diversity of human experience by means of concepts. Like Sensibility's two kinds of intuition, the Understanding's concepts are of two kinds:

1. *Empirical concepts* tied to experience (*a posteriori*), and,
2. *Intellectual concepts* independent of experience (*a priori*).

Empirical concepts tend not to receive much attention in studies of Kant. Their content depends upon information (stimuli) provided to our senses. They present features common to many objects so that, as a concept, they provide a general representation as formed by the mind using comparison/contrast, abstraction, and reflection.³⁸¹ *Intellectual concepts* are not tied to experience but arise from the nature of the Understanding itself.

Kant, always seeking the pure—the *a priori*—argues that when we consider the content of a human judgment by abstracting out of it what belongs to the Understanding, we arrive at four *logical functions*. These, he then argues, in a similar manner correlate to four *categories*, which provide us with the names of concepts of the Understanding. He uses two tables to set these out, which are here combined into one:³⁸²

³⁸⁰ Concepts are rules, or rule sets (of combination or of synthesis).

³⁸¹ On the subject, see Rogerson, "Kant and Empirical Concepts." Also see Schrader, "Kant's Theory of Concepts."

³⁸² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, Part II, Div. I: Transcendental Analytic, Book I: Analytic of

Categories of Understanding

| Quantity | | Quality | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Logical Function</i> | <i>Concept of . . .</i> | <i>Logical Function</i> | <i>Concept of . . .</i> |
| Universal | Unity | Affirmative | Reality |
| Particular | Plurality | Negative | Negation |
| Singular | Totality | Infinite | Limitation |

| Relation | | Modality | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Logical Function</i> | <i>Concept of . . .</i> | <i>Logical Function</i> | <i>Concept of . . .</i> |
| Categorical | <i>Substantia et accidens</i> | Problematic | Possibility– Impossibility |
| Hypothetical | Causality & Dependence | Assertoric | Existence– Non-existence |
| Disjunctive | Community | Apodictic | Necessity– Contingency |

The three specifiers under each title help shed light, though some terms, such as “assertoric” (i.e., a simple assertion of fact (that something *is* or *is not* the case)) and the contrasting “apodictic” (i.e., something capable of being demonstrated as indisputable) are hardly parts of common speech outside philosophy.

Such concepts as Kant sets out are all important to the mind’s effort to make of experienced reality something intelligible.³⁸³ Without conceptual categories human beings cannot have “experience,” argues Kant, because concepts are the tools of Understanding by

Concepts, Chapter 1, §2: Of the Logical Function of the Understanding in Judgments (A70/B 95 (end)) and §3: Of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding (A 80/B 106). (Guyer and Wood, 206 and 212; Meiklejohn, 58 and 64).

³⁸³ In this light we might recall the remark of Josiah Royce, “Kant’s Terminology,” 591: “In general, Kant conceives philosophy as the sum total of what he terms *Reine Vernunftserkenntniss aus Begriffen*—an expression most easily translated as ‘conceptual knowledge gained through pure reason alone.’”

which things make sense and become intelligible. So although Sensibility is foundational, it is Understanding that is the human faculty key to distinguishing the objective validity of *a priori* concepts—Kant’s chief concern—from a merely subjective perspective completely determined by actual experience, which necessarily will always be limited in scope.³⁸⁴

The Supreme Faculty of Cognition: Reason

In describing Kant’s synthesis we have never left the matter of cognition. Above all other cognitions reigns the faculty of Reason (*Vernunft*). It supersedes and governs the cognitions of Sensibility and Understanding. The latter two function in what we might picture as a bottom-up processing, rooted in sensation. In *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant opens up some general remarks on Reason by writing, “All our cognition (*Erkenntnis*) rises from the senses, goes from there to the Understanding (*Verstände*), and ends in the Reason (*Vernunft*), beyond which is nothing higher. . . .” Thus Reason is the “supreme faculty of cognition.”³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ Royce, “Kant’s Terminology,” 591, succinctly captures the sense of *Verstand* in this respect when he describes it as “the power that forms *concepts* (*Begriffe*), or that knows, or furnishes, or applies the *rules* of the formal constitution of conceptual objects. The *Verstand* is also the power to apprehend the unity which gets expressed in our judgments.”

³⁸⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, Part II, Division II: Transcendental Dialectic, Introduction, II.A: On Reason in General (A 298/B 355). (Guyer and Wood, 387; Meiklejohn, 212). German: *Alle unsere Erkenntnis hebt von den Sinnen an, geht von da zum Verstande und endigt bei der Vernunft, über welche nichts Höheres . . .* “Supreme faculty of cognition”: *obersten Erkenntniskraft*. Kant next tortuously compares Reason to the faculty of Understanding, which we will not do here. Kemp Smith, *Commentary*, 442,

Earlier in the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant had set out the “higher faculties of cognition” as three in number:³⁸⁶

1. Understanding (*Verstand*);
2. Judgment (*Urtheilskraft*); and
3. Reason (*Vernunft*).

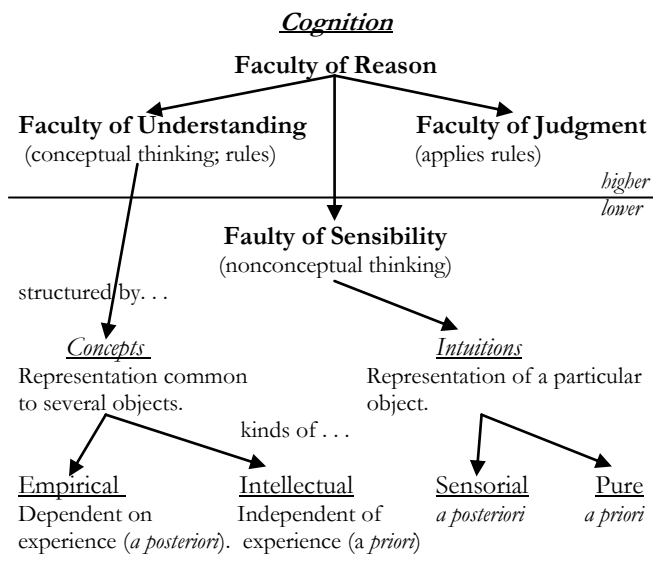
Now, later in the *Critique*, Kant tries to distinguish Reason from Understanding. In this effort he describes Reason as “the faculty of principles” rather than of ‘rules’ like the Understanding (to which Judgment adheres, as it is the faculty of deciding whether something has or has not met a particular rule). Principles are *a priori*. Kant writes, “Therefore, I would describe cognition from principles as that in which I recognize the particular in the general by means of concepts.”³⁸⁷

rightly remarks, “The argument which follows is extremely obscure.”

³⁸⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, Part II, Division I: Transcendental Analytic, Book II: The Analytic of Principles (B 169) (Guyer and Wood, 267; Meiklejohn, 103).

³⁸⁷ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, Part II, Division II: Transcendental Dialectic, Introduction, II.A: On Reason in General. The first quote is from A 299/B 356 (Guyer and Wood, 387; Meiklejohn, 212). German: *das Vermögen der Principien*; the second, longer quote is from A 300/B 357 (Guyer and Wood, 388; Meiklejohn, 213). German: *Ich würde daher Erkenntniss aus Principien diejenige nennen, da ich das Besondere im Allgemeinen durch Begriffe erkenne*. Both Guyer and Wood, as well as Meiklejohn, render *erkenne* as “cognize.” The term *erkennen* generally refers to a kind of knowing through recognition, and is generally rendered as ‘recognize.’ It can also be translated by English words like ‘perceive,’ ‘identify,’ ‘detect,’ ‘realize,’ or even, broadly, ‘know.’ N.B. Kant alludes to a “common principle” (*das gemeinschaftliches Princip*) in the Preface to the First Edition (A xx) but never elaborates on it.

Reason, as this faculty of principles, facilitates knowing based on its own powers, able to discern the nature of particulars using pure concepts.³⁸⁸ Kant puts Reason over Understanding. The latter, for example, unifies appearances (*phenomena*) by use of its rules; Reason unifies the rules of Understanding under its principles.³⁸⁹ We now have a more complete picture:



³⁸⁸ Kemp Smith, *Commentary*, 442, puts it this way: “A true principle is one that affords knowledge of the particulars which come under it, and which does so from its own internal resources, that is to say, through pure concepts.”

³⁸⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, Part II, Division II: Transcendental Dialectic, Introduction, II.A: On Reason in General (A 302/B 359) (Guyer and Wood, 389; Meiklejohn, 214). German: *Der Verstand mag ein Vermögen der Einheit der Erscheinungen vermittelt der Regeln sein, so ist die Vernunft das Vermögen der Einheit der Verstandesregeln unter Principien.*

There is more that might, and perhaps should be said about Kant's cognitions, but let us note one last matter as it is one we must return to in a moment.

Cognition functions in both a *theoretical* and a *practical* fashion. Kant succinctly distinguishes these from one another late in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "I content myself here to explain 'theoretical cognition' (*theoretische Erkenntniss*) as about recognizing (*erkenne*) that which *is*, and 'practical' (*die praktische*) as about that which *ought to be*."³⁹⁰ This broad distinction provides grounds for his first two major critiques. It is also one important in other respects we shall soon see.

Summing Up Kant's Scheme

Kant's synthesis shifts focus from the thing *known* to the *Knower*. The mind of the Knower is the decisive element. Kant presents the human mind as active, vital, and indispensable to knowledge. While he can agree with empiricists like Hume that we must reckon with sensory data from real objects (*Noumena*), because the mind is involved and operates according to its own fixed rules, all that can be known is what occurs in human experience (*Phaenomena*). A thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*) remains forever outside our epistemological grasp.

In sum, for Kant knowledge is specifically about how the mind applies itself to the human experience of reality. While trying to respect the external objects that

³⁹⁰ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, Part II, Division II, Book II, Chapter 3: The Ideal of Pure Reason, §7 (A 633/B 661). (Guyer and Wood, 585; Meiklejohn, 389). German: *Ich begnüge mich hier, die theoretische Erkenntniss durch eine solche zu erklären, wodurch ich erkenne, was da ist, die praktische aber, dadurch ich mir vorstelle, was dasein soll.*

we encounter, when we talk about ‘knowing’ we mean *how* human beings supply what is needed to make meaning out of experience. As we have seen, this entails receiving external information through sensations, which the faculty of Sensibility structures through its intuitions. The faculty of Understanding utilizes its categories of concepts to unify these disparate particular experiences. The faculty of Reason oversees this entire enterprise.³⁹¹

Knowledge & Belief

Hume’s epistemology focuses more on belief than on knowledge *per se*; it is a distinctive and distinguishing characteristic of his theory. Kant likewise troubles himself to expend considerable energy working out the nature of belief and its relation to knowledge.

Kant tries to carefully distinguish between *Wissen* (“knowledge”) and *Glaube* (“belief”). In his preface to the second edition of *Critique of Pure Reason* he observes that although the practical interests of morality require positing the existence of things like God, freedom, and immortality, these aren’t actually *known*. Any effort by Reason to suggest they are is pretentious because it presumes to apply principles suited for human experience to objects beyond such experience. “I must,” Kant concludes, “revoke knowledge (*das Wissen*) to get a place for belief (*Glauben*).”³⁹²

³⁹¹ Chignell, “Belief in Kant,” 323, offers this succinct summary: “first there is sensory or pure intuition, then conceptualization in accordance with categorical rules, and, ultimately, cognitive experience that is susceptible to propositional judgment.”

³⁹² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to Second Edition, 14th para. German (B xxxi) (Valentiner ed., 37): *Ich musste also das Wissen aufhe-*

Kant's provocative statement draws attention to itself and, unfortunately, lends itself to overly dramatic interpretations. He simply wishes at this point to alert the reader that traditional metaphysical dogmatics, so naïve in its understanding of Reason, cannot yield a knowledge of supremely important matters. Instead, when Reason is properly comprehended, such matters will be seen to belong to a rational *Glaube*. But rational belief is *not* the same as knowledge.

Belief & Theoretical Reason

To grasp how belief fits into an epistemological scheme we must first see how Kant addresses the matter of *Glaube* as “belief” in *Critique of Pure Reason*. He observes that because speculative cognition has an objective basis only in experience, it is an overstep when *Glaube*, like the hypotheses of the human intellect, is treated as a matter of ‘science.’³⁹³ He later points out

ben, um zum Glauben Platz zu bekommen. . . . Belief in Kant is a complicated subject and extends beyond epistemology alone.

³⁹³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Dialectic, Book II: The Dialectical Inferences of Pure Reason, Chapter 2: Antinomy of Pure Reason, §3 (A 470–71/B 498–99) (Guyer and Wood, 500; Meiklejohn, 295). In his translation Pluhar, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 31 n. 122, with this passage in view, notes *Glaube* can be translated as either “belief” or “faith” but argues that, “As these terms are used in English, faith is usually considered incompatible with knowledge, whereas belief normally is not (but is even included in standard definitions of knowledge). Hence Kant’s *Glaube*, in the full sense of the term, must be rendered as faith.” This pushes the facts too far. While it is true many definitions of knowledge accept a view that knowledge is ‘warranted, true belief,’ we have seen how often belief and knowledge are seen as thoroughly incompatible. Moreover, it does not take much acquaintance with literature on faith to see it is quite often seen as compatible with knowledge—and sometimes even as a form of it!

that in the sphere of experience Reason's principles are always being tested by empirical observations. But in the realm of speculative philosophy, where metaphysics is inevitably dogmatic, the situation is different. In that arena conflict occurs via the contest of rational ideas. In such contests what Reason allows is limited; demonstrative certainty cannot be established. Reason, he says, is benefited by its examination of the opposing sides on any given matter, which corrects its judgments and shows their limits. In the course of such discussion it is not inappropriate to "speak the language of a firm belief (*festen Glaubens*), although at the same time you must surrender that of knowledge (*Wissens*)."³⁹⁴

Belief and Judgments of Assent

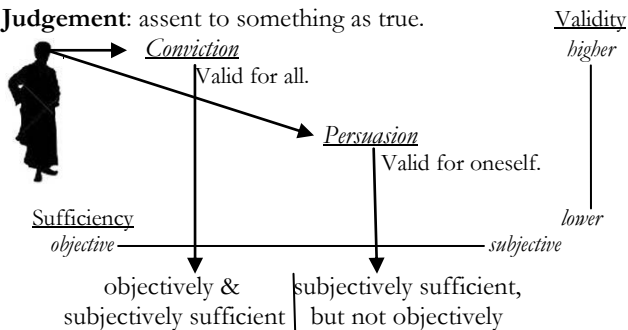
In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant opens the remarks of his third section of 'The Canon of Pure Reason,' concerning 'Opinion, Knowledge, and Belief' (*Meinen, Wissen und Glauben*), by writing, "Assenting to something as true is an event in our Understanding (*Verstande*), one we take as based on objective grounds, but that requires also subjective causes in the mind of one who judges."³⁹⁵ He then distinguishes between a *convic-*

³⁹⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Method, Chapter 1: The Discipline of Pure Reason, §2: The Discipline of Pure Reason in Polemics (A 744–45/B772–73) (Guyer and Wood, 646; Meiklejohn, 353). German: *Glaubens zu sprechen, wenn ihr gleich die des Wissens habt aufgeben müssen*.

³⁹⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Method, ch. 2: The Canon of Pure Reason, §3 (Guyer and Wood, 684–85; Meiklejohn, 496). The German *Meinen*, "opinion," has a range of senses captured by various English words reflecting one or another kind of thinking or intending, including functioning as a synonym of belief-thinking. German: *Das Fürwahrhalten ist eine Begebenheit in unserem Verstande, die auf objectiven Gründen beruhen mag, aber auch subjec-*

tion (*Überzeugung*), which is a judgment grounded in validity for every rational being, from a *persuasion* (*Überredung*), an illusion made by mistaking the judgment's ground as objective when instead it lies entirely in the person (and is thereby valid only for that person). At a purely subjective level conviction and persuasion look the same; the difference lies in the grounds for the judgment of reason, namely whether valid for all reasoning beings or not. It looks like this:

Judgement: assent to something as true.

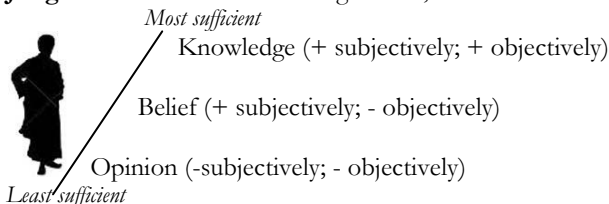


"I can keep persuasion for myself, if I so decide," he says, "but I cannot, and should not, want to assert it as prevailing for others."³⁹⁶

tive Ursachen im Gemütthe dessen, der da urtheilt, erfordert. The phrase "Assenting to something as true" renders the German *Fürwahrhalten*.³⁹⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Method, Chapter 2: The Canon of Pure Reason, §3 (A 821–22/B 849–50) (Guyer and Wood, 685; Meiklejohn, 496–97). German: *Überredung kann ich für mich behalten, wenn ich mich dabei wohl befinde, kann sie aber und soll sie ausser mir nicht geltend machen wollen.* Judgment is a matter of strong concern in epistemology, though we must largely pass over it with respect to Kant in this chapter. One might read Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, but all the difficulties encountered in general with Kant's writing are there magnified, so the reader is forewarned!

Kant then elaborates that assenting to something as true (a judgment) has three degrees of sufficiency: both subjectively and objectively insufficient; subjectively sufficient, but not objectively; and both subjectively and objectively sufficient. He then names these judgments as *opinion*, *belief*, and *knowledge*.

Judgement: assent to something as true, with *conviction*.

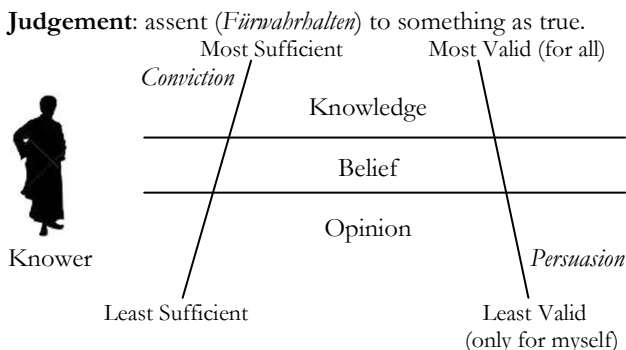


Key: + = sufficient - = insufficient

The old epistemological quality of sufficiency (*Zulänglichkeit*) thus aids in distinguishing between knowledge and belief (and opinion).³⁹⁷ Kant remarks, “Subjective sufficiency is termed ‘conviction’ (for myself); objective sufficiency is termed ‘certainty’ (for

³⁹⁷ Pasternack, “Development and Scope of Kantian Belief,” 292–93, correlates objective sufficiency with strong epistemic warrants, and subjective sufficiency with strong confidence of a proposition’s truth and commitment to it. Rauscher, “Positive Role of Reason,” 307, writes, “Having an opinion is taking something to be true that has no justification either with reference to the object or with reference to the nature of the cognitive faculties. Believing has reference to the cognitive faculties but not any object. Knowing has reference to an object and accords with the cognitive faculties.” Rauscher’s view takes ‘objectively sufficient’ to refer to claims of a direct reference to publicly available empirical objects; ‘subjectively warranted’ to refer to claims from, or in accord with, shared faculties of the mind.

all).”³⁹⁸ Knowledge distinguishes itself by its certainty: it is, with respect to subjective conviction, objectively warranted; in knowledge both conviction and certainty coexist. We thus end up with this composite picture:³⁹⁹



Belief, it can be seen, occupies important middle ground.

Like many before him, in Kant’s view, opinions have no place in the judgments of pure Reason (*reiner Vernunft*); they are nothing more than the imagination at play. Belief, though, is something higher, though falling short of knowledge. Belief statements are adequate subjective grounds to judge something as true but they are always *a posteriori*—in need of empirical assistance (*empirischen Beihülfe*), as Kant puts it—and they don’t permit themselves to be imparted to others in equal

³⁹⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Method, Chapter 2: The Canon of Pure Reason, §3 (A 822/B 850) (Guyer and Wood, 686; Meiklejohn, 498). German: *Die subjective Zulänglichkeit heisst ueberzeugung (für mich selbst), die objective Gewissheit (für jedermann)*. The word rendered “conviction” is *Zulänglichkeit*; that translated “certainty” is *Gewissheit*.

³⁹⁹ For an alternative depiction, see Chignell, “Belief in Kant,” 358.

measure.⁴⁰⁰ What is key (and a point we shall turn to again in a moment) is that, as Kant puts it, “[I]t can only be in a practical relation that something theoretically insufficient is assented to be true and that is named ‘believing’ (*Glauben*).”⁴⁰¹

This is all consistent with his position that many of the matters that traditional metaphysics wrestles with—free will, morality, God—remain with respect to actual human experience purely speculative matters.⁴⁰² If the objective is *theoretical*, Reason falls short.

Reason: Theoretical & Practical

Fortunately, Reason is a robust faculty. It may seem odd that we have not more closely considered this matter so far in our discussion of Kant, since his first two great works of critique are both on Reason. But the distinction between theoretical and practical Reason, briefly introduced earlier, is especially pertinent to understanding the place of belief.

Kant, in the Preface to his 2nd edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, makes plain he sees Reason as pursuing one or another of two basic objectives: determining the object and its concept, or making the object

⁴⁰⁰ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Method, ch. 2, §3 (A 823/B 851) (Guyer and Wood, 686; Meiklejohn, 498). German: *noch in gleichem Maasse anderen mittheilen lassen*.

⁴⁰¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Method, ch. 2, §3 (A 823/B 851) (Guyer and Wood, 686; Meiklejohn, 498). German: *Es kann aber überall bloss in praktischer Beziehung das theoretisch unzureichende Fürwahrhalten Glauben genannt werden*.

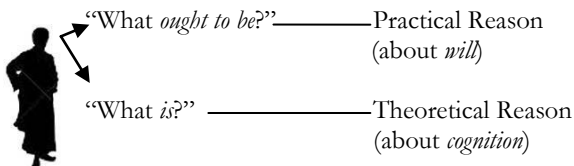
⁴⁰² Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 310, remarks, “The ideas of the self, the cosmos, and God cannot give us any theoretical knowledge of realities corresponding to these ideas. The function of these ideas is simply and solely regulative.”

actual.⁴⁰³ Put a little differently, *theoretical Reason* (or *speculative Reason*) concerns itself with the big questions and metaphysic's ultimate goal of understanding reality. This is an ideal goal—and unachievable with respect to *Noumena* (things as they *are*). On the other hand, *practical Reason* concerns itself with bringing about what *ought* to be (regardless of what *is*, which cannot be known!).

In his *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant again calls Reason “the faculty of principles” (*als das Vermögen der Prinzipien*). By “principle” he means here an “interest” (*Interesse*) that determines the condition promoting the use of either theoretical (speculative) or practical Reason. Each has its own specific interest prompting its use: “The interest of its speculative use consists in the cognition (*Erkenntnis*) of the object up to the highest *a priori* principles; that of its practical use in the determination of the will with regard to the final and entire end.”⁴⁰⁴ Practical Reason is higher.

It looks like this:

Knower



⁴⁰³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to the Second Edition, 4th paragraph (B x) (Guyer and Wood, 107; Meiklejohn, xxv).

⁴⁰⁴ *Critique of Practical Reason*, Book II: Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason, Chapter 2, §3: Of the Primacy of Pure Practical Reason (5:120) (Abbott, 216; Gregor, 100). German: *Das Interesse ihres spekulativen Gebrauchs besteht in der Erkenntnis des Objekts bis zu den höchsten Prinzipien a priori, das des praktischen Gebrauchs in der Bestimmung des Willens in Ansehung des letzten und vollständigen Zwecks.*

The section in *Critique of Practical Reason* where Kant explains this is titled ‘Of the Primacy of Pure Practical Reason in Its Connection with Speculative Reason.’ Its primacy rests in holding the prerogative to determine connection with the rest, which he says means the interest of speculative reason is subordinated to that of pure practical reason.⁴⁰⁵

Belief & A ‘Practical Point of View’

Kant regards such supremely important things as God, freedom of the will, and immortality to be beyond the reach of theoretical Reason. Practical Reason is required instead. Practical Reason provides human morality. Put a bit differently, it is Reason operating practically by providing principles of conduct—guiding human behavior through the exercise of will to respond to the question of what ought to be.

When something like moral duty is considered, for example, people automatically think of God. But God cannot be caught by theoretical Reason; God is not some object to be known. Rather the existence of God (and similarly of the soul’s immortality) is a matter of belief.⁴⁰⁶ Belief stems, as we saw a moment ago, from a “practical point of view” (*in praktischer Absicht*) rather

⁴⁰⁵ The explicit statement of pure practical reason’s primacy is given at *Critique of Practical Reason*, Book II: Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason, Chapter 2, §3: Of the Primacy of Pure Practical Reason (5:121) (Abbott, 218; Gregor, 101), with the assumption that it is based *a priori* on Reason itself and is therefore necessary.

⁴⁰⁶ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §91: On What Kinds of Assent Results from a Practical Faith (5:469–70) (Bernard, 403–04; Guyer and Matthews, 333–34; Pluhar, 362–63).

than a theoretical one.⁴⁰⁷ It is a matter of will and action rather than some passive cognitive attitude.

When discussing doctrinal belief, Kant makes a broader point about the nature of *Glaube*. “The word ‘belief’ refers only to the direction that an idea gives to me, and to its subjective influence on the conduct of my reason, which holds me fast to it, even though I may not be in a position to give an account of it from a speculative point of view.”⁴⁰⁸

Kinds of Belief

As the above suggests, Kant distinguishes various kinds of belief. In examining the matter closely, one scholar lists “beliefs of testimony, historical beliefs, beliefs of reason, practical/pragmatic beliefs and moral beliefs.”⁴⁰⁹ In general, though, three kinds traditionally draw the most attention:

1. Pragmatic;
2. Doctrinal; and,
3. Moral.

Some beliefs, Kant terms *pragmatic*. He gives the example of a physician uncertain of the cause of a disease who forms a belief based on the best use of his

⁴⁰⁷ On this expression in Kant, see Guyer, *Kant on Freedom*, 333–71.

⁴⁰⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Method, Chapter 2, The Canon of Pure Reason, §3 (A 827/B 855) (Guyer and Wood, 688; Meiklejohn, 501). German: *Das Wort Glauben aber geht nur auf die Leitung, die mir eine Idee giebt, und den subjectiven Einfluss auf die Beförderung meiner Vernunftthandlungen, die mich an derselben festhält, ob ick gleich von ihr nicht im Stande bin, in speculativer Absicht Rechenschaft zu geben.* The word *Vernunftthandlungen* is rendered “conduct of reason,” i.e., how reason acts, or as Guyer and Wood render it, “actions of reason.”

⁴⁰⁹ Pasternak, “Development and Scope of Kantian Belief,” 297.

judgment after observing symptoms. The belief is contingent (i.e., tied to the particular situation), but provides ground for using specific means to achieve an end. The strength of such beliefs can be measured by the simple test of a bet: how much is the person holding the belief willing to wager based on it?⁴¹⁰

A different kind of belief arises in situations where the matter is purely theoretical. He calls such beliefs *doctrinal*. These kinds of belief occur where no actual course of action is available with respect to some object, which leaves our judgments about it purely theoretical. However, we are still able to mentally conceive of a course of action, and we think if we had the means of actually determining the objective truth this would justify that course.⁴¹¹

The third main sort of belief is *moral*. In it, something *must* happen—the end of meeting one’s moral duty (obligations) is fixed and necessitates God’s existence. About Kant’s view on this much has been written (and beyond the scope of the present volume).⁴¹²

Kant’s epistemology, in the parlance popular today, is “not your father’s epistemology.” It looks different from what we saw in looking at the ancient Greeks, and it looks different from what most philosophers do today in epistemology. But its reach has been profound.

⁴¹⁰ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Method, Chapter 2, The Canon of Pure Reason, §3 (A 824–25/B 852–53) (Guyer and Wood, 687; Meiklejohn, 499).

⁴¹¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Method, Chapter 2, The Canon of Pure Reason, §3 (A 824–25/B 852–53) (Guyer and Wood, 687; Meiklejohn, 499–500).

⁴¹² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Method, Chapter 2, The Canon of Pure Reason, §3 (A 828–29/B 856–57) (Guyer and Wood, 688–89; Meiklejohn, 501–02).

Chapter 12

German Idealism & Hegel's System

The 19th century is barely begun when Kant departs the scene (1804). The epistemological landscape has been altered dramatically by his work.

Kant's revolution continues something already present in the work of both the Rationalists and Empiricists. Both schools in their own way psychologize epistemology by drawing attention to how a Knower knows. But Kant's synthesis puts the Knower in a place of prominence in such a manner that the question '*who* knows?' eclipses the questions about what knowledge is, whether it is possible, and how it is achieved.

The new attention to the Knower means also a reevaluation of the *what* is known. As we saw with Descartes, while still adhering to the conviction that real things exist external to the Knower, his system creates a mediating factor—the idea—between Knower and object, so that what is, in fact, known is the idea (seen as a faithful representation of the object). Kant's surrender of hope to know a thing as it *is* (*Noumena*) creates a seemingly unbridgeable gap between Knower and real object. This is quickly seen even in Kant's lifetime as a significant issue—and one immediately addressed.

German Idealism

After his death, Kant's program is continued in German Idealism (late 18th–early 19th century). Much of

it can and should be seen as an effort to deal with the difficulties produced by Kant's position, especially the split between *Noumena* and *Phaenomena*. German Idealism is a philosophical perspective that is more a 'movement' than a 'school,' spawning notably different views among a number of prominent thinkers. In addition to owing a debt to Kant the German Idealists are also influenced by Romanticism (late 18th–mid 19th cent.), a movement responding to the earlier Age of Reason, or Enlightenment (18th cent.)—the period associated with Descartes, the British Empiricists, and Kant.

The philosophy of German Idealism produces a number of significant thinkers, three of which emerge most prominently. They all have important personal and professional connections to each other, but one emerges as the most influential thinker of his day.

The first, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), is committed to maintaining Kant's position, except for his problematic gap between *Phaenomena* and *Noumena*. Instead he affirms that whatever actually *is* must also be *knowable*. From his university post at Jena, Fichte develops what he calls *Wissenschaftslehre* (roughly, 'Science Theory'). Stressing subjectivity he argues that consciousness, the seat of human experience, is the key.

The second figure, Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854), promotes intuition over reason. Both Fichte and Schelling in their own ways emphasize the idea of development. For Fichte it is history unfolding from instinct to reason, while in Schelling nature's ideal, a 'world soul,' develops through stages paralleling the process whereby spirit strives toward consciousness of itself.

Both Fichte and Schelling help set the stage for the third figure, the most influential of thinker of his time.

G. W. F. Hegel

The figure who walks onto the philosophical stage to assume center position, who becomes in his lifetime the most famous of philosophers, is Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831).⁴¹³ A friend of Schelling since their days together as students at Tübingen, he sides with him in an early work comparing the systems of Fichte and Schelling. However, Hegel soon goes his own way and later succeeds to Fichte's position at the University of Berlin. Ultimately he eclipses them both.

Despite a reputation of being hard to accurately translate,⁴¹⁴ and as difficult to understand as Kant,⁴¹⁵ Hegel has exercised significant influence down to the present. Perhaps much of this can be attributed to readers finding in his work what they *wish* to see, for Hegel's thought can and has been read in many different ways.⁴¹⁶ As one Hegelian scholar wryly notes, "Out-

⁴¹³ On German Idealism and its figures, see Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*.

⁴¹⁴ Rockmore, *Cognition*, 4, charitably writes, "Hegel, who magisterially exploits the resources of the German language of his day, is not easy to render into English." A somewhat different, but no less deferential comment comes from the early 20th century translator Baillie, *Phenomenology of Mind*, I, xxxiii, who observes, "There seems no doubt the work was written with less regard than usual to literary effect. . . ." but adds, "It is impossible, as it is unfair, to expect any one who is staggering under the weight of absolute truth to move to the graceful measures of a literary minuet." Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel*, xi, is more blunt: "Hegel was a *horrible* writer."

⁴¹⁵ Westphal, *Hegel's Epistemology*, 1, speaks for the choir when he remarks, "Hegel's *Phenomenology* is notoriously challenging, in form and structure as well as content." Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel*, xii, is even more candid: "To read Hegel is to be bewildered. . . ."

⁴¹⁶ See Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel*, ix, just with respect to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the various ways the text has been read.

side of Hegel scholarship, Hegel is widely regarded as the Prince of Darkness.”⁴¹⁷ Within such scholarship, though, there has been, if anything, increased appreciation and attention to Hegel in recent decades. In short, scholarship on Hegel is replete with controversies and even a short consideration of his thinking on knowledge cannot help but run the risk of inadvertently arousing criticism no matter what is said. Nevertheless, the aim here will be to present a very basic overview of his view of knowledge.

One controversy about Hegel has been to what extent he is an epistemologist at all! Certainly he is engaged with its history, especially since Descartes, and in his critique of Rationalists and Empiricists he is even more radical than Kant. Among recent scholars there has been a pronounced interest in seeing Hegel as an epistemologist.⁴¹⁸ A century before Husserl made the term famous, Hegel styles his first great work a ‘Phenomenology’—literally, the study of phenomena—which in Hegel carries a sense of a science of experience wherein one seeks to grasp the rules and structure that help disclose the purpose of experience.⁴¹⁹

Hegel & Kant

Hegel, like other German Idealists, concerns himself greatly with Kant. In his *Science of Logic* (*Wissenschaft der Logik*), which first appeared in 1812, Hegel remarks about ‘Kantian philosophy’ that, “[W]hatever may be

⁴¹⁷ Westphal, “‘Hegel’s’ Epistemology?,” 304.

⁴¹⁸ See, for example, Habermas, “From Kant to Hegel,” 133–38; Rockmore, *Cognition*, 2; Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel*, 173; Westphal, *Hegel’s Epistemology*, xi.

⁴¹⁹ Cf. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel*, 10.

said, here or elsewhere, about its distinguishing character or about particular parts of its exposition, it constitutes the basis and starting-point of newer German philosophy and as such its merit remains unmitigated by whatever faults may be found in it.”⁴²⁰ Unfortunately, as he comments on Kant and works with his ideas, Hegel does so in a manner that has led subsequent philosophers to see him in widely divergent ways in respect to his predecessor.⁴²¹ In broad strokes we can safely state that Hegel, whatever his intent, ends up presenting a distinctive view that—however its relation to Kant is appraised—stands on its own merits.

Hegel appreciates Kant’s shifting of attention to the Knower, but the most notable and immediately fundamental difference between them is Hegel’s rejection of Kant’s philosophical resignation in concluding a thing-in-itself (*Noumenon*) cannot be known. The gap that Kant creates between *Noumena* and *Phaenomena* generates enormous problems. How can one speak meaningfully—or even at all—about a reality not only outside experience but beyond our concepts as well? The

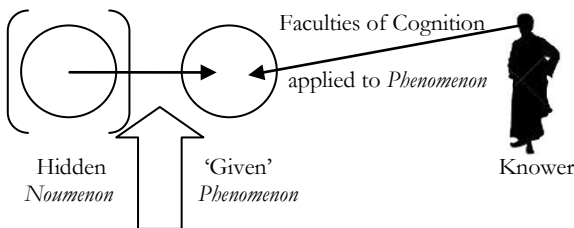
⁴²⁰ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, I, Introduction: General Division of Logic (21.47, fn. 1). “Kantian philosophy”: *Kantische Philosophie*. The “basis and starting-point”: *die Grundlage und den Aufgangspunkt*.

⁴²¹ For example, Solomon, “Kant’s Epistemology,” argues that Hegel’s epistemology attempts to rework and make consistent Kant’s key contentions in *Critique of Pure Reason*. Sedgwick, *Hegel’s Critique of Kant*, 1, offers “the thesis that Hegel offers us a compelling critique of and alternative to the conception of cognition Kant argues for in his ‘Critical’ period (from 1781–1790).” Cambridge Core, *Virtual Special Issue: Hegel and Kant*, in its online introduction sums up the matter: “Hegel’s relation to Kant has long been and remains heavily debated. Does Hegel essentially accept and take forward Kant’s critical philosophy, or does Hegel modify and transform it or reject it altogether?”

notion that *Noumena* somehow affect human senses despite being inaccessible to sense-perception seems to be magical thinking. Hegel emphatically denies the existence of Kant's gap.⁴²²

Just as Kant had diverged from Hume's 'fork,' Hegel diverges from Kant's 'gap.' Kant's gap is created by thinking of *Phaenomena* as representations of *Noumena*, with only the former being possible to be known.⁴²³

Kant's 'Transcendental Idealism'



The 'gap' between what *is* and what *appears* **Representational Thinking**

Hegel, on the other hand, thinks he has found a way to free himself from such representational thinking.⁴²⁴ What he proposes constitutes a radical solution to the problem of Kant's gap. The following picture shows this rather dramatically:

⁴²² See Habermas, "From Kant to Hegel," 132–34.

⁴²³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, Part II, Division II, Book II, Chapter 1: The Paralogisms of Pure Reason, Criticism of the Fourth Paralogism of Transcendental Psychology (A 369). (Guyer and Wood, 426; cf. Meiklejohn, 307).

⁴²⁴ Longuenesse, *Hegel's Critique*, 13, writes, "Hegel claims for himself the merit of having broken with all representational modes of thinking in order to settle in the standpoint of what he calls 'the Concept,' where thought becomes conscious of its identity with itself in each and every one of the contents it thinks."

Hegel's 'Absolute Idealism'



Consciousness

No 'gap' exists between Knower and known, though the known is granted independent existence.

Nonrepresentational Thinking

This initial illustration for Hegel is simplistic but it visually shows quite clearly his difference from Kant. Hegel's nonrepresentational thinking proposes we think differently about what we seek to know. Instead of imagining objects projecting representations that cognition interacts with, as Kant proposes, Hegel suggests we analyze the efforts of the human consciousness in attempting to know. Consciousness becomes aware of itself while wrestling with its awareness of the object of its attention. Within consciousness the Knower and the known meet, interact, and progressively come to a final state of knowledge—Absolute knowledge.⁴²⁵ This process is described in the work he uses to introduce his philosophical system.

⁴²⁵ Rockmore, *Cognition*, 3, remarks, "We cannot know facts, objects, or anything else other than as they appear within consciousness. According to Hegel, we reach knowledge when our view of the object and the object as it is given to us, or is within mind, coincide."

Hegel's most often studied work is his Jena lectures (1805–06) published under the title of *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*) in 1807.⁴²⁶ It is a work that despite intense scrutiny eludes certainty in interpretation.⁴²⁷ Part of that problem undoubtedly stems from the short time in which it was written—less than a year (and it is a long book)—being allegedly completed the eve of the battle of Jena (October 14, 1806), which forced Hegel to flee the town as Napoleon's victorious French troops occupied it. But, as noted earlier, Hegel's style compounds the problems of deciphering his complex thoughts.⁴²⁸ Perhaps not surprisingly, then, even such seemingly mundane matters as the title of the volume and its table of contents—of which there are two—have contributed to the difficulties and debates over how the work should be understood.⁴²⁹ This is of no little significance given that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* stands self-consciously as the introduction to Hegel's philosophical system.

⁴²⁶ Baillie's translation appears under the title *Phenomenology of Mind*. Rockmore, *Cognition*, 4, criticizes the choice of "mind" for *Geist* on the grounds it is misleading by calling the reader's attention to philosophies of mind such as found in English empiricism that do not fit. In ordinary German *Geist* is generally better served by the English choice "mind," but in Hegel the sense of "Spirit" seems preferable.

⁴²⁷ For a brief review of some of the important interpretive issues, see Marx, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, ix–xii.

⁴²⁸ Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel*, xi, writes, "He wrote very quickly, carelessly, the kind of writing that feels inspired at three in the morning, a bottle of Rhine wine by one's side, but often becomes kindling for the fire the following afternoon."

⁴²⁹ See Pinkard's translation, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, xvi–xvii.

There is no easy way to approach this volume, nor to describe it, but one way that may be useful is to begin by examining its title's principal terms—phenomenology and spirit—and then continuing by focusing on its basic architecture and general methodology. Our own special interest in the matter of knowledge means we shall be especially focused on gaining a general picture of what Hegel says about it, starting in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* but not restricting ourselves to it alone.

The German title *Phänomenologie des Geistes* introduces two key terms, but neither separately. So our first note may be of the word that links them—*des*, the genitive form of the article, translated “of.” Hegel wishes us to understand that his phenomenology is *of* something.

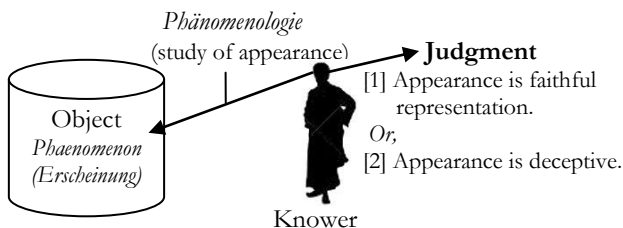
“Phenomenology”

The title's first term hearkens to a long philosophical conversation. The ancient Greeks and Hellenistic thinkers in their effort to grasp what knowledge is kept returning to the possibility that a thing as it *is* might be different from that thing as it *appears*. The study of “appearances”—*phenomena*—quickly became a routine part of what epistemology must consider. However, by Hegel's time the matter had become complicated by various issues such as those Kant brought to the foreground. So when Hegel chooses to call his work a ‘Phenomenology’ it is not as simple a matter as merely saying he has made “phenomena” his focus.

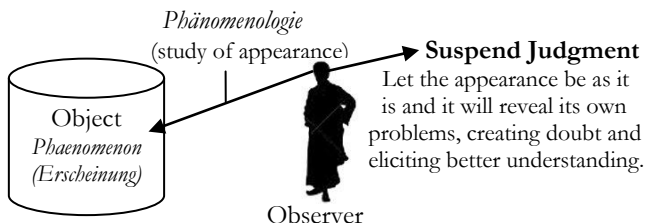
The German word *Phänomenologie* is a simple derivative of two familiar Greek words: the base is the term *phainomenon* (φαίνόμενον; pl. *phainomena*), mediated down through Latin (*phaenomenon*), and meaning “appearance”; the suffix is that versatile and important word

logos (λόγος), appended to mean “study of,” so that together “phenomenology”—as noted earlier—literally means “the study of phenomena,” or “the study of appearances.” The ordinary German noun for an “appearance” is *Erscheinung* (verb “to appear” is *erscheinen*).

These details might not matter so much except that it has long been observed that an “appearance” can mean a faithful representation of something or it can mean a deceptive or misleading representation. That issue is precisely what philosophers have argued about for centuries. But Hegel does not help his readers by selecting and defending just one of these options; he uses both.⁴³⁰ The situation ordinarily looks like this:



But Hegel, we’ve seen, disputes representational thinking like that shown above. So we have to modify the picture as follows:



⁴³⁰ See Inwood’s translation, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, vii.

It is quite possible Hegel's selection and use of the term arises out of his knowledge of Kant and ongoing interaction with his thought.⁴³¹ Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786) used "phenomenology" in a sense like that found in physics (what Kant calls "universal natural science"), where there is a difference between 'real' and 'apparent' motion. Kant argues that it is a mistake to confuse 'appearance' with 'illusion,' and when he speaks of 'appearance' he has in mind something prior to any judgment of the Understanding about it; it is merely how a thing seems to the senses. This 'appearance' (*Erscheinung*) is then transformed into 'experience' (*Erfahrung*).⁴³² Since one of Hegel's alternative titles for his work is "Science of the Experience of Consciousness," perhaps he is thinking of phenomenology as the study of how appearances transform into experience and provide knowledge.⁴³³ In short, 'phenomenology' means *learning about something*.

"Geist"

Hegel's title tells us that the appearance he is learning about is *Geist*—"Spirit." Though commonly used in German for "mind" there has come to be general agreement that Hegel means it in a way better rendered in English by "spirit" (or "Spirit"). But that does not make the meaning straightforward. For one thing—a rather substantive one at that—the capitalized English

⁴³¹ On this matter and Kant's text, see Pinkard, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, xviii.

⁴³² Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of the Natural Sciences*, Chapter 4: Foundations of Phenomenology (AA 555). See on this passage, Friedman, *Kant's Construction*, 415.

⁴³³ See Pinkard's translation, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, xviii.

word is often used for God, and the German *Geist* also can, and does at times in Hegel, refer to the Christian deity.⁴³⁴ The uncapitalized “spirit” is used in English in various ways, for example as synonymous to “soul” in a spiritual sense, or “psyche” in a psychological one.

In Hegel, *Geist* in the sense of “spirit” is also uncertain. Perhaps, as translator Michael Inwood has it, *Geist* in this work “commonly refers to the collective mind or ‘spirit’ shared by a group of people,” in line with Hegel’s own expression, “*I* that is *We*, and *We* that is *I*.”⁴³⁵ Or perhaps, as translator Terry Pinkard suggests, Hegel has Kant’s use in mind and so *Geist* “would be the essence hidden behind experience, and the phenomenology would be the ‘science’ itself of how that essence makes it appearance. . . .”⁴³⁶ But as Pinkard later observes, by the time Hegel finishes his work, “What had been an inquiry into the essence behind appearance has turned out as a ‘phenomenology’ to show that *Geist* is in fact not the hidden essence behind appearance but actually is its series of appearances as it has shape-shifted itself in its history up to this point.”⁴³⁷

⁴³⁴ Hegel, recall, had been a seminarian preparing to become a Lutheran minister.

⁴³⁵ First quote: Inwood, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, vii, who quotes the Hegel text here. Second quote: Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Part B: Self-Consciousness, Chapter 4: The Truth of Self-Certainty, A, ¶177. Miller’s 1977 translation numbered his English paragraphs to correspond to the German original text (though not perfectly); this practice has been followed by both Inwood and Pinkard in their translations and has become a convenient way to indicate where in the text a passage is found. German: *Ich, das Wir, und Wir, das Ich ist*.

⁴³⁶ Pinkard, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, xviii.

⁴³⁷ Pinkard, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, xxxv.

Each of these possibilities has reasoning to commend it. Hegel is very much focused on the operations of rational minds and presenting things in relationship. But Hegel is also keenly interested in that timeless quest of the epistemologist to get at final, ultimate—*absolute*—knowledge, the truth finally revealed after experience has fully unfolded itself. As with so many matters in Hegel, we cannot know with perfect confidence what meaning for *Geist* mattered most to him, and given his contentment with exploring multiple senses for things perhaps it is not inordinately important that we pin him down on this matter.⁴³⁸

The titles two key terms, then, are clearly important but also obviously dynamic and susceptible to different construals. To begin to get a sense of what Hegel intends by them we have to look to the body of the work. In doing so we very quickly find another term is key.

“The Absolute”

Hegel’s preface, written after the book was completed, offers a difficult overview that may best be left to be read *after* the rest of the work. But in it he does immediately tell us something we do well to keep in mind. He tells us, “philosophy is essentially in the element of universality, that includes in itself the particular.”⁴³⁹ Hegel intends to pursue what is universal without neglecting or diminishing the particular.

His introduction is truly that, providing a broad sketch, beginning with an acknowledgement that to

⁴³⁸ For a detailed examination of *Geist* in Hegel, see Hardimon, *Hegel’s Social Philosophy*, 42–52.

⁴³⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Preface, ¶1. German: *die Philosophie wesentlich im Elemente der Allgemeinheit ist, die das Besondere in sich schließt.*

consider the metaphysical question of what really *is* one must begin with epistemology, specifically the cognition of the one who would know. He identifies the interest of cognition as “the Absolute” (*das Absolute*),⁴⁴⁰ about which he says, “the Absolute alone is true, or the true alone is Absolute.”⁴⁴¹

This engages him in the question of Kant’s gap, which we considered earlier. Hegel very studiously tries to avoid the error of simply presuming anything; his “phenomenology” is both about phenomena and also “phenomenological” in the sense of trying to simply report what appears rather than presupposing what it means. By letting appearances be as they are, their own natures raise doubts about them. This arouses epistemological skepticism, but not of a purely negative kind because the goal of such doubt is to achieve a positive result—a better understanding.⁴⁴²

At this point, Hegel offers a strong declaration:

But the *goal* for knowledge (*Wissen*) is as necessarily fixed as the series for progression is; it is there where it no longer needs to go beyond itself, where it finds itself, and the concept (*Begriff*) corresponds to the object and the object to the concept. The progress toward this goal

⁴⁴⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Introduction, ¶73.

⁴⁴¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Introduction, ¶75: *das Absolute allein wahr, oder das Wahre allein absolut ist*. The Absolute is that which is unconditioned, independent, and final—the very opposite of the relative and conditional. Verene, *Hegel’s Absolute*, 99, draws attention to its attention throughout Hegel’s system: “Note that it functions as an adjective in the titles of the three conclusive moments of his system: *Das absolute Wissen*, ‘Absolute Knowing’ (in the *Phenomenology*); *Die absolute Idee*, ‘The Absolute Idea’ (in the *Science of Logic*); and *Der absolute Geist*, ‘Absolute Spirit (in the *Encyclopaedia*).”

⁴⁴² Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Introduction, ¶¶75–79.

is inexorable and finds no satisfaction at any earlier station.⁴⁴³

Knowledge has a predetermined goal that means knowing must adhere to a certain path. The journey of knowing ends when knowledge “no longer needs to go beyond itself” because “it finds itself.” At that very point the concepts of the Knower exactly correspond to the known—and vice versa. Like Aristotle, Hegel has confidence in the stretching toward knowledge that exists in humanity and also a confidence that absolute knowledge can and must be reached.

Of course, what he has just said begs introduction of the next matter he turns to: the question of a *criterion*. What measure or standard keeps one on the right track and assures the results? The ancient Skeptics, of course, focused on the question of a criterion for knowledge and sharply criticized the dogmatism of the competing philosophical schools (Peripatetic, Epicurean, Stoic, etc.). Descartes and those who came after him also looked to this issue. Questions about a criterion inevit-

⁴⁴³ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Introduction, ¶80: *Das Ziel aber ist dem Wissen ebenso notwendig als die Reihe des Fortganges gesteckt; es ist da, wo es nicht mehr über sich selbst hinauszugehen nötig hat, wo es sich selbst findet, und der Begriff dem Gegenstände, der Gegenstand dem Begriffe entspricht. Der Fortgang zu diesem Ziele ist daher auch unaufhaltsam und auf keener früheren Station Befriedigung zu finden.* German has more than one word for “knowledge”; Di Giovanni, *Science of Logic*, lxx, in his translator’s note succinctly says, “*Wissen* carries the connotation of ‘being aware of’; *erkennen*, of ‘being acquainted with.’” *Begriff* is sometimes rendered as “notion” and sometimes as “concept.” Verene, *Hegel’s Absolute*, 102, favors the latter (with a small ‘c’) and writes, “Hegel’s *Begriff* is a ‘concrete universal’ in which the particular is formed in a dialectical, nonabstractive manner and by means of which consciousness can think or know a thing as it actually is.” The German *Station* can also be rendered “phase” or “stage.”

ably are about *truth*. But, Hegel argues, the previous ways of wrestling with truth and a criterion were inadequate. What is needed is a study of consciousness, and “consciousness gives its own measure in its own self.”⁴⁴⁴ With this, attention at the end of the introduction turns to the term and subject which will be at the heart of Hegel’s understanding of knowing leading to Absolute knowledge.

Consciousness

Although the Absolute is Hegel’s goal, and he will end his work with a discussion of “Absolute Knowledge,” he proceeds after the introduction in a roundabout way toward this goal. His course of action—his methodology—itself is an answer to the problem posed by Kant’s gap. To get at the Absolute one must focus on *consciousness*.⁴⁴⁵

The first three chapters of *Phenomenology of Spirit* are collectively titled ‘Consciousness’ (*Bewußtsein*). The German term is a simple compound, from the adjective prefix *bewußt* (“aware”) + the noun *Sein* (“being”), so that consciousness means “an aware being.” But the term is not meant ontologically, like the English word ‘mind,’ but epistemologically, meaning cognitive awareness (i.e., “being aware”). It is thus like the Latin compound from which the English word “consciousness” is derived: the prefix *con* (“with”) + the stem *scire* (“to

⁴⁴⁴ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Introduction, ¶¶81–89. The quoted material is from ¶84: *Das Bewußtsein gibt seinen Maßstab an ihm selbst.*

⁴⁴⁵ Inwood, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, x, writes, “Hegel proposes the following solution: we should consider, not directly the absolute itself, but the series of forms or ‘shapes’ of consciousness that have occurred in our attempts to grasp the absolute.”

know”), for *conscius*—“with awareness,” meaning “conscious” or “knowing.”⁴⁴⁶

Consciousness is not a static property of mind but a dynamic mental process that developmentally unfolds in progressive growth toward its goal of the Absolute. In order to describe this development Hegel employs a descriptive method known as *dialectic*. The term is a familiar one dating back to Socrates, whose dialectical method is famous—but it is *not* Hegel’s dialectic, except in the very generic sense that it involves opposing sides. Elsewhere he calls it a “speculative mode of cognition” different from other modes of cognition.⁴⁴⁷

‘Dialectic’

Although it does not do him justice, Hegel’s method has become popularized by a famous formula:

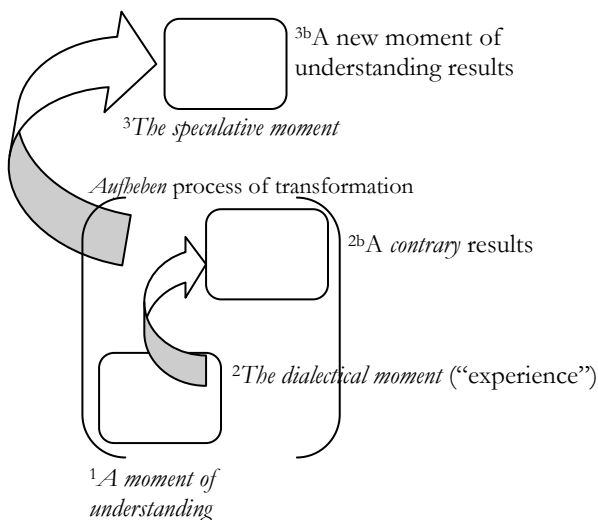
‘thesis-antithesis-synthesis,’

where a proposition set forth as a ‘thesis’ is contradicted by its opposite (‘antithesis’) before the two are reconciled in a final formation (‘synthesis’). This way of describing things is simple and clear, but it is *not* one set out by Hegel. It is a formulation derived much later. What Hegel does is actually much richer.

⁴⁴⁶ The word *Bewußtsein* is rather straightforwardly rendered as “consciousness,” but that does not mean its sense is self-evident. Balibar, “Consciousness,” 185, writes “For Hegel, the words *Bewußtsein* and *Selbstbewußtsein* (self-consciousness) are related to *Wissen*, to scientific knowledge or to knowledge in general.” Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel*, 320, likens it to ‘knowing something’ and compares what Hegel is doing to similar to Plato in the *Theaetetus*. On the etymology and meaning, also see Verene, *Hegel’s Absolute*, 102.

⁴⁴⁷ Hegel, *Elements of a Philosophy of Right*, Preface. In *Phenomenology of Spirit* see Preface, ¶¶64–66 and especially Introduction, ¶¶85–87.

Let's start with a picture:⁴⁴⁸



This illustration needs some unpacking, and we can start by returning to the introduction to *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel tries to explain the dialectical process: the knower, in observing what the process of knowing is, realizes that both “concept and object, measure and what is to be examined” are present in consciousness. Thus consciousness is consciousness of both object and itself; “consciousness is itself their comparison.” This comparison discloses differences and the ensuing examination of these differences results in observing alterations—the very stuff we call “experience.”⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁸ See Hegel, *Science of Logic*, §§79–82.

⁴⁴⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Introduction, ¶¶85–87. First quoted material from ¶85 (*daß Begriff und Gegenstand, der Maßstab und das zu Prüfende*); 2nd from ¶85 (*indem das Bewußtsein sich selbst prüft*).

Hegel writes, “This *dialectical* (*dialektische*) movement, which consciousness (*Bewußtsein*) exerts at itself, both in respect of its knowledge (*Wissen*) and its object, *insofar as the new true object rises from it*, is in actual fact what is called *experience* (*Erfahrung*).”⁴⁵⁰ He returns to his description of the dialectical process, starting with a particular moment—when “consciousness knows *something*” (our illustration’s moment of understanding). In this moment consciousness has assumed a particular shape, or form. But in this moment consciousness discovers *two* objects: the object being known has its own existence *and* it exists for consciousness! Comparison of these produces alteration. This is the dialectical moment of experience.⁴⁵¹

Experience is a learning that negates in order to produce something positive—a better understanding. The first moment of understanding has been seen to be untrue, leading to a contrary result—a negation of the first understanding—which does not lead to nothing but eventuates in “a new shape of consciousness, which is different from the previous one.” Immediately Hegel then tells us that, “It is this condition which guides the whole progression of shapes of consciousness in their necessity.” This necessity—the emergence of a new

⁴⁵⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Introduction, ¶186: *Diese dialektische Bewegung, welche das Bewußtsein an ihm selbst, sowohl an seinem Wissen, als an seinem Gegenstände ausübt, insofern ihm der neue wahre Gegenstand daraus entspringt, ist eigentlich dasjenige, was Erfahrung genannt wird.*

⁴⁵¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Introduction, ¶186: *Das Bewußtsein weiß etwas.*

shape—occurs, suggests Hegel, “behind the back” of consciousness, which is not aware how it happens.⁴⁵²

Hegel employs a nicely versatile German term—the noun *Aufhebung* (verb *aufheben*)—to depict the transformation process. The word has a number of senses. A basic one is a sense of elevating, a raising up such as Hegel has in mind of consciousness rising to a higher shape of itself (though this sense is only implied in Hegel’s work). But the word can also mean an annulment or end of something, as happens when a prior shape is set aside (but not forgotten). Then, too, it can mean a preservation of something, which also fits because even as a prior shape of consciousness is annulled that which in it is worthy is preserved. Both of these latter senses are explicit in Hegel. Various English words are used by translators, but the most common seems to be “sublate,” which pictures an assimilation of a prior shape into a later, greater one.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵² Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Introduction, ¶87. 1st quote: *eine neue Gestalt des Bewußtseins auftritt, welcher etwas anderes das Wesen ist als der vorhergehenden*. 2nd quote: *Dieser Umstand ist es, welcher die ganze Folge der Gestalten des Bewußtseins in ihrer Notwendigkeit leitet*. The German *Umstand* can be rendered “circumstance,” but that seems more ambiguous in English than “condition,” which better connotes the factual nature of the process. The English “shapes” translates *Gestalten* (fr. *Gestalt*), a word well-known from psychology; it can also be rendered “forms” or “structures.” 3rd quote: *hinter seinem Rücken vorgeht*.

⁴⁵³ See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ¶113; *Science of Logic*, Chapter 1: Being, C.3: Sublation of Becoming (§§93–94); *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, Part I: The Science of Logic, §96. For an interesting examination of Hegel’s use of *aufheben* and a comparison/contrast with theologian Bernard Lonergan’s use of the English “sublation,” see Rixon, “Locating Hegel’s *Aufhebung*” (see 494–98). Also see Verene, *Hegel’s Absolute*, 100.

All three senses of *Aufhebung*, together with the inherent root sense of ‘grasping’ something, fit in with a general view of *knowledge as knowing*. It is not the passive accumulation of information but something a Knower *does*. It is, as he says, a matter of human experience.

Hegel claims the necessity that guides the dialectical process with its unfolding of experience is *science* and because its content is experience, it must be a *science of experience*.⁴⁵⁴ This science is consciousness learning about itself. Through progression of shapes of consciousness it will at last reach a shape in which what *appears to be* is identical with what *is*. The resulting “science of spirit” will mean consciousness grasps its own essence; “it will designate Absolute knowledge itself.”⁴⁵⁵

In the first three chapters of *Phenomenology of Spirit* the dialectical process reveals consciousness progressing from knowing through ‘what is immediate,’⁴⁵⁶ (i.e., what seems certain to the senses), to perception, to understanding.⁴⁵⁷ This is a logical progression.

⁴⁵⁴ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Introduction, ¶88. German: *Durch diese Notwendigkeit ist dieser Weg zur Wissenschaft selbst schon Wissenschaft, und nach ihrem Inhalte hiermit Wissenschaft der Erfahrung des Bewußtseins.*

⁴⁵⁵ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Introduction, ¶89. German: *wird es die Natur des absoluten Wissens selbst bezeichnen.* Rockmore, *Cognition*, 197, writes, “For there to be knowledge, three conditions must be met: the cognitive subject and object must coincide; this must occur for a subject; and it must occur within consciousness.”

⁴⁵⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Chapter 1, ¶90, “Knowledge of the immediate, or *what is*.” (*Wissen des Unmittelbaren oder Seienden ist.*)

⁴⁵⁷ Hegel actually writes of “force and understanding,” by which he means the force whereby a transformation to a higher unity in understanding (above sensation and perception) is achieved.

Things change in chapter 4 as Hegel turns from consciousness to “Self-consciousness” (*Selbstbewußtsein*). The character of the shapes of consciousness now moves from a strictly logical progression (sensation-perception-understanding) to one that can be seen in history itself.⁴⁵⁸ After that, successive chapters take up:

- Reason (chapter 5), in history without being tied to particular things, which he considers as theoretical, practical, and their combination;⁴⁵⁹
- *Geist* (chapter 6), ‘being-in-itself,’ which is the fulfillment of reason, and where Hegel’s focus is on how *Geist* strives to shape itself to its true form as manifested historically;⁴⁶⁰
- Religion (chapter 7), with its rough grasp of the Absolute, where self-conscious spirit sees itself objectively as universal spirit;⁴⁶¹ and,
- Absolute knowledge (chapter 9), i.e., spirit knowing itself completely, as spirit.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁸ Although thinking in terms of historical progression means Hegel can trace the development of conceptual knowing through time, he is not so inflexible as to imagine that illustrative examples from history mean that the self-realization of consciousness *has* to take the particular historical forms he observes.

⁴⁵⁹ One might think here of Hegel’s famous saying, “What is rational, that is real; and what is real, that is rational.” (*Was vernünftig ist, das ist Wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig.*) See *Elements of the Philosophy of the Right*, Preface (Nisbet translation, 20).

⁴⁶⁰ On *Geist*, Findlay, “Analysis,” 550, begins his summary of ¶438 (Miller’s numbering; 437 in Pinkard) with “Reason becomes Spirit when it achieves the full consciousness of itself as being all reality.”

⁴⁶¹ From his own day to this, Hegel’s views on religion have been vigorously debated as to their meaning. See ¶808.

⁴⁶² Cunningham, “Significance,” 620, writes, “The final outcome of his study is the standpoint of absolute knowledge, which conse-

In a later work, when summarizing what he said in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes:

Consciousness (*Bewußtseyn*) is the spirit (*Geist*) as concrete and externality-bound knowledge (*Wissen*); but the development of this subject is solely based—like the development of all natural and spiritual life—on the nature of the *pure essences* that make up the content of the logic (*Logik*). Consciousness (*Bewußtseyn*), as the appearing spirit (*der erscheinende Geist*), which on its way frees itself from its immediacy and external concreteness, becomes ‘pure knowledge’ (*reinen Wissen*), that takes these pure entities themselves, as they are in- and for-themselves, as its object.⁴⁶³

The progressive development of *Geist* through the shapes of consciousness moves from very basic, concrete knowledge rooted in the external world through a dialectical process of knowing to reach pure knowledge—which transcends knowledge!⁴⁶⁴

Ultimately, for Hegel *knowledge is the process of knowing* (as experiential learning) whereby *Geist*, through rational consciousness, achieves Absolute knowledge. While this strikes many as hubristic, if Hegel is understood as emphasizing an ongoing and still unfulfilled

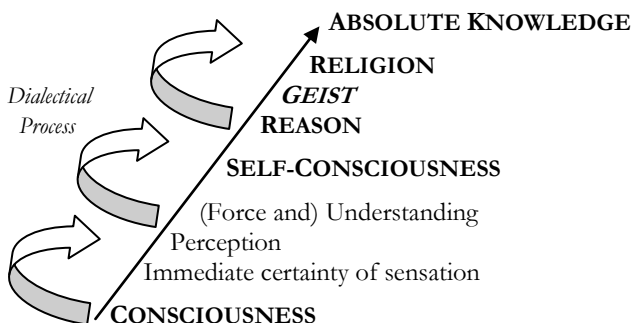
quently must be accepted as his definition of what seemed to him to be the true characteristics of thought.”

⁴⁶³ Hegel, *Science of Logic* (*Wissenschaft der Logik*), Preface to the 1st edition, 8. Cf. translations in Di Giovanni, 10; Johnston and Struthers, 37; and Miller, 28.

⁴⁶⁴ Carlson, *Commentary*, 55, remarks about the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “Consciousness, then, reveals itself to be nothing else but *impure* knowing and therefore no adequate foundation for knowledge. Pure knowing, in contrast, ‘ceases itself to be knowledge,’ (69) because knowledge insists on a distinction between the *knower* and the *known*.”

process of development of *Geist*, then he is spared from the embarrassment of any pretence to claiming he has achieved in his system a final answer for all time. He knows his system is conditioned by its own time in history. *Geist* continues learning about itself.

Though again necessarily simplistic, we can picture Hegel's epistemology as a process of knowing:



Those who followed Hegel's system quickly diverged along separate paths. In Germany his followers assured it remained ascendant in the years following his death. Elsewhere, such as in the English-speaking world, Hegel's influence was slower to gain traction, largely because of the lag in time between his writings appearing and their translation into English. Some British and American philosophers became known as 'Neo-Hegelians,' but their allegiance to Hegel was of a different sort than on the Continent. They took up his method without committing to his system's doctrines.

Of course, not everyone fell under the sway of Hegelianism. On the Continent his system immediately attracted opposition from 'the lonely Dane,' Søren Kierkegaard.

Chapter 13

Existentialism & Phenomenology

In the generation following Hegel's death, his followers in Germany expound his system and its influence is felt widely, including in the small country north of modern Germany, the kingdom of Denmark. There some figures take up Hegel's system, though it is also debated and rejected by others. In the end, one figure stands out for producing a remarkable protest, complete with a compelling alternative perspective. That person, of course, is Søren Kierkegaard.⁴⁶⁵

Existentialism's Forebears

Kierkegaard is recognized as the first 'existentialist' though the name "Existentialism" would not appear until some 90 years after Kierkegaard's death. There are and have been many existentialists, but it is hard to call Existentialism a 'school' of philosophy, at least in the sense that term might apply to a Stoic or an Epicurean. Rather, Existentialism is a *movement* with a distinctive *perspective*. As the name itself points out, it is "existence" that is at its center. Rather than posit that human beings live out some inner human nature (a view termed 'Essentialism'), existentialists contend that each individual through his or her free choices creates a unique

⁴⁶⁵ For a discussion of Hegel's influence in Denmark, see Pattison, "Hegelianism in Denmark."

existence, self-defined and, to be authentic, fully embraced with conscious accountability.

A number of significant thinkers have been associated with Existentialism, some embracing the label (e.g., Jean Paul Sartre) and others rejecting it (e.g., Albert Camus). It divides into a religious wing (e.g., Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel) and a secular one (e.g., Friedrich Nietzsche, Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre). The perspective is as noted for its expressions in literature and psychology as in philosophy.

Existentialism is birthed in response to both Kant and, especially, to Hegel.⁴⁶⁶ It can be seen legitimately as a continuing protest against traditional philosophy. Existential thinkers commonly distance themselves from ‘philosophy,’ particularly as associated with ‘systems.’ Instead, they concentrate their analysis of experience on that of the *individual* and do so with their interest in *subjectivity* rather than some abstract objectivity.

Søren Kierkegaard

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), retrospectively viewed as Existentialism’s founder, does not like Hegel’s system—and is not bashful in saying so.⁴⁶⁷ Unfor-

⁴⁶⁶ Sigmar von Ferson, “Existential Philosophy,” 103, succinctly traces it back to “disappointment” in Kant’s gap between appearance and thing-in-itself, and in Hegel’s system.

⁴⁶⁷ For an interesting overview of Kierkegaard’s relation to Hegel see Kroner, “Kierkegaard’s Understanding of Hegel.” For an extended treatment see Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard’s Relation to Hegel*. The anti-Hegelianism of Kierkegaard’s *corpus* is so well-known it hardly warrants mention. But Nason, “Opposites,” offers a focus on his engagement with Hegel’s logic on a particular matter (the doctrine of mediation), which is helpful for seeing Kierkegaard’s *reasoning* in disputation. On the other hand, Stewart, “Kierkegaard’s Relation to

unately, his stylistic manner can mislead a reader into concluding from his comments the existence of an irrationalism that isn't actually there. For example, though he raves against 'reason,' he does not have reason *per se* in mind, but *Hegel's* 'reason.'⁴⁶⁸ More broadly, perhaps, he has the Enlightenment sense of reason in mind, something detached and above history and thus of little value in the passionate struggles of actual existence.⁴⁶⁹

To free himself from the problems attached in talking about reason, Kierkegaard shifts focus to "understanding" (Danish *Forstand* = German *Verstand*). But Kierkegaard's use of *Forstand* is such that translators have struggled with whether the English word "reason" or "understanding" is the better choice.⁴⁷⁰ The issue continues to engage translators and its resolution may come down to deciding whether or not the Kantian distinction between reason (*Verstand*) and understand-

Hegel," argues that more careful attention to Kierkegaard's sources modifies the prevailing notion of the polemic against Hegel.

⁴⁶⁸ Skaggs, "Role of Reason," 613, 617, contends that instead of depending on "reason" (Danish *Fornuft*), he relies on the concept of "understanding" (*Forstand*), by which he can reject Hegel's system, with its "reason" (German *Vernunft*), and situate faith in relation to a higher understanding.

⁴⁶⁹ Evans, *Passionate Reason*, x (see 23–49), writes that Kierkegaard contests the prevailing Enlightenment vision of reason as "an autonomous, objective power, a timeless faculty whose historical character was not taken seriously."

⁴⁷⁰ The Danish *Fornuft* is generally rendered "reason." Noted Kierkegaard translators David Swenson and Walter Lowery vigorously debated whether *Forstand* should be rendered "understanding" or "reason," finally compromising by generally using the former but sometimes the latter as determined by specific context. See Burgess, "Forstand." Cf. Skaggs, "Role of Reason" (especially 623 n. 15).

ing (*Vernunft*) is important in comprehending Kierkegaard's use of *Forstand* and *Fornunft*.⁴⁷¹

Kierkegaard's emphasis on *Forstand* (understanding) serves his interest in subordinating reason to faith, or to put it in philosophical terms, to set aside a rational system like Hegel produces in favor of a reason that stretches itself toward transcendence. Understanding steers the individual to an awareness requiring belief against mere understanding.⁴⁷² As we shall see in a moment, Kierkegaard's chief interest lies in *faith*.

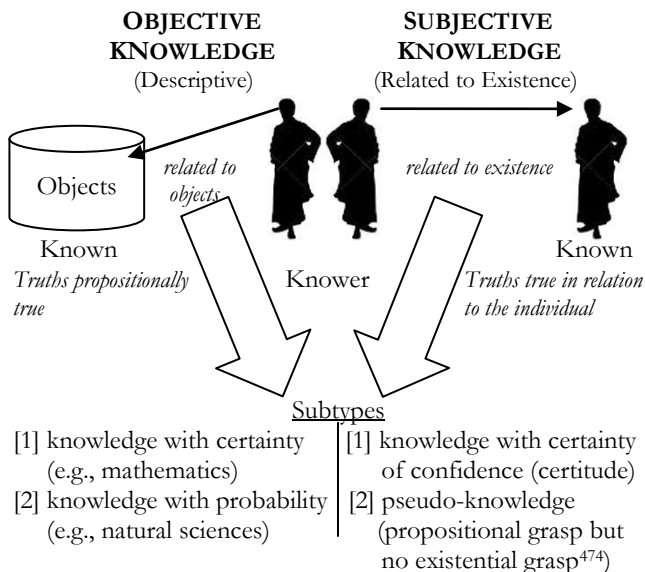
With respect to knowledge, Kierkegaard's extensive use of pseudonyms, each representing a particular perspective, complicates assessing to what extent a unified view can be discerned in his work. It seems plausible to conclude as contemporary scholar Marilyn Gaye Piety has, that Kierkegaard is an "epistemological pluralist," who envisions various kinds of knowledge, but these all falling into one or the other of two broad kinds: Objective knowledge (*den objective Viden*), or Subjective knowledge (*den subjective Viden*). An example of the former kind is that found in the natural sciences; knowledge related to ethics or religion is of the latter kind. Each type can be further divided into subtypes.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷¹ Burgess, "Forstand," 115–18. In Burgess' view, Kierkegaard knows the distinction made by Kant, but he avoids it in his writing. He suggests we look not to philosophical usage to understand a term like *Forstand*, but to religious use.

⁴⁷² See Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 501; also see Skaggs, "Role of Reason," 614, who cites this passage.

⁴⁷³ Piety, *Ways of Knowing*, 3; also see 46–48, ch. 4 (objective knowledge), and ch. 6 (subjective knowledge). She sees his interest in epistemology arising from his deeper interest in ethics (ix). For a very brief survey on Kierkegaard's epistemology and recent scholarship see Aho and Evans, "The Single Individual," 172–75.

Following Piety's lead we might picture Kierkegaard's view of knowledge as follows:



Though probably undervalued as an epistemologist, it is no secret that historically his thought has been most associated not with his thinking on knowledge, but on belief, or more precisely, faith. Kierkegaard is probably best remembered by most people for ostensibly espousing a so-called “leap of faith” (Danish *Troens Spring*). Kierkegaard never actually uses that phrasing. But he does embrace the idea of a leap, and by it he means a profound staking of all that one is and has in a

⁴⁷⁴ Piety, *Ways of Knowing*, 3, calls pseudo-knowledge “a kind of hypocrisy where the knower professes to have grasped in its essence something that his existence betrays he has not grasped.”

bold but unsecured act of trust. As in many other matters, Kierkegaard's religious thinking on this is also epistemological.⁴⁷⁵

Kierkegaard's concept of a leap needs to be seen in the context of his opposition to intellectualism. Kierkegaard does not regard logic as able to account for the transitions from one quality to another that are actually found in the world of facts, where such transitions occur by a leap. In other words, transitions by their very nature are 'leaps' because they breach continuity of experience. Rational demonstration cannot explain such changes. In actual thinking people leap to a sudden understanding; similarly the transition from scepticism to belief is a leap.⁴⁷⁶

In short, Kierkegaard's various discussions of 'the leap' cannot be divorced from his thinking about knowledge. He is, as one writer has put it, an epistemologist who views knowledge in its relation and service to faith.⁴⁷⁷ Though never a theologian in an academic sense, nor a philosopher in that same regard, he is a profound and influential thinker.

⁴⁷⁵ Skaggs, "Role of Reason," 614–15, argues that Kierkegaard shares with Aquinas a general sense of the limits of human existence and thought, and thus a need for a transition ('leap') that transcends natural knowledge to reach faith. She argues that Kierkegaard's idea derives from Aristotle's theory of *kinesis*—movement, motion, change. The 'leap' is a transition from the realm of thought to that of actual existence.

⁴⁷⁶ Swenson, "Anti-intellectualism of Kierkegaard." However, Backhouse, *Kierkegaard's Critique*, 111–23, warns against presuming a uniform understanding for Kierkegaard's various uses of the idea. In Kierkegaard, see *Journals and Papers*, vol. 6, 156.

⁴⁷⁷ Sloty, *Kierkegaard's Epistemology*, 19, declares, "He deserves to be presented just as he wanted to be understood: as a theoretician of knowledge, especially as a theoretician of the knowledge of faith."

While Kierkegaard predates him, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) is commonly thought of as a second ‘father’ of Existentialism. Where Kierkegaard espouses a fervent Christianity, Nietzsche opposes it and his Existentialism is an atheistic, secular brand. Nietzsche forms his epistemological thinking particularly with respect to Kant, whose position he finds wanting.⁴⁷⁸

Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche presents no systematic epistemology.⁴⁷⁹ But unlike Kierkegaard’s pluralistic presentation, Nietzsche’s epistemology presents a single, identifiable position, one that has come to be called *perspectivism*. As the name indicates, perspectivism emphasizes the individual’s singular point-of-view.

Individual perspectives and the interpretations that accompany them present an understanding of the world that reflects personal values. Even sense-perception is a perspective, influenced by emotion and by the limitations of our human capacities (e.g., we cannot sense everything as our perspective is limited), which incite in us the completion of everything our perspective lacks.

Perspectivism likely comes as close to offering his theory of knowledge as we shall find. Nietzsche scholar

⁴⁷⁸ Doyle, *Nietzsche on Epistemology*, presents him as responding to Kant with the objection that Kant’s epistemology produces the very skeptical idealism he seeks to avoid and so must be rejected. In its place Nietzsche presents an anthropocentric perspectivism that asserts an objective, empirical knowledge is possible (when it is ‘comprehensive,’ meaning, in harmony with multiple perspectives).

⁴⁷⁹ Hales and Welshon, *Nietzsche’s Perspectivism*, 5, observe, “Nietzsche was a complex, often non-linear, thinker.”

Bernd Magnus proposes that if we look at it in that fashion we discover four claims:

1. An accurate representation of reality as what *is* is impossible.
2. Philosophical theories lack a correspondence to reality that allows a judgment of them as being true or false.
3. No particular method of knowing (e.g., science vs. logic) is better than another.
4. Our own human needs shape how we understand reality.

But the way Nietzsche presents things, Magnus says, tends to run all four together and confuse them such that in the end his perspectivism seems self-contradictory. Of course, Magnus also points out, another way to construe what Nietzsche says in his perspectivist remarks is that they do *not* present a theory of knowledge (or anything else). In fact, maybe he is parodying such a theory.⁴⁸⁰

Perhaps, then, as other scholars have proposed, Nietzsche's perspectivism is just a guide for talking about knowing and knowledge.⁴⁸¹ Nietzsche does not systematize his position; in fact, he offers it as a counter to the systemizing philosophy of his day.⁴⁸² So we need to look to other figures.

⁴⁸⁰ Magnus, "Nietzsche and the Project," 52–53.

⁴⁸¹ Hales and Welshon, *Nietzsche's Perspectivism*, 12, point out that "perspectivism" for Nietzsche denotes no single thesis, or even a specific set of related doctrines." They liken it to a "regulative ideal" or "unifying theme."

⁴⁸² Welshon, *Philosophy of Nietzsche*, 97, remarks, "Truth perspectivism is intended by Nietzsche to serve as a counter to the pervasive absolutism in the philosophical tradition."

Phenomenology

The persons we must look to first are better associated with a perspective named “Phenomenology” than with Existentialism. Yet because Existentialism as it emerges in the 20th century is so indebted to Phenomenology the latter’s chief architects must be considered before we continue examining Existentialism.

The philosophy of Phenomenology, inaugurated by Edmund Husserl *before* mid-20th century Existentialism has become so tied up in the roots of Existentialism, figures so prominently in the writings of the existentialists, that separating the two philosophies is fraught with debate.⁴⁸³ A figure like Martin Heidegger, who succeeds Husserl and develops Phenomenology in a distinctive fashion, may eschew the label of existentialist, but it remains commonly attached to him because his version of phenomenology so influences avowed existentialists.

Edmund Husserl

The originator of Phenomenology (*Phänomenologie*) is Edmund Gustav Albrecht Husserl (1859–1938). He is another figure whose body of work is complex and difficult.⁴⁸⁴ It is also distinguished as marked by enough change that many commentators on it distinguish a ‘later’ from an ‘earlier’ Husserl.⁴⁸⁵ Here we will only

⁴⁸³ Stumpf, *Scrates to Sartre*, 490, writes, “Phenomenology is rationalistic whereas existentialism is concerned with such practical issues as making choices, decisions, and personal commitments.”

⁴⁸⁴ Moran, *Husserl*, 10–11, remarks, “His work is complex and, even with growing English translations, relatively inaccessible. As even the most casual encounter will confirm, he is a difficult—even torturous—thinker. . . .”

⁴⁸⁵ E.g., Zahavi, *Husserl’s Phenomenology*. Notably, though, as Carr’s translator’s introduction to Husserl’s *Crisis*, xv, notes, each time

briefly touch upon some of the fundamental architecture of his thinking and stay focused on our concern with knowledge.

Husserl is part of a generation of distinguished and very different philosophers; Henri Bergson and John Dewey—both considered in later chapters—were born the same year. But where the French Bergson and the American Dewey come under other influences, Husserl's mind is marked by his exposure to Franz Brentano (1838–1917), philosopher and psychologist, whose thoughts about “intentionality” greatly impress Husserl.

The connection to psychology is of no small importance. Husserl had attended the lectures of the ‘Father’ of modern psychology, Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), before studying under Brentano, and with the latter's advice went on to become an assistant to prominent psychologist Carl Stumpf (1848–1936).⁴⁸⁶ As an established professor, Husserl in the mid- to late 1920s taught lecture courses on “Phenomenological Psychology” and “Intentional Psychology.”⁴⁸⁷

Although not his first published work, we shall begin with Husserl's 1900 *Logical Investigations* (*Logische Untersuchungen*), in which he offers a critique of “psychologism,” empiricism's representationalist account of knowledge most associated with John Stuart Mill (1806–1873). In the 2nd edition of the work Husserl calls it, “a work of breakthrough, and thereby not an end, but a

Husserl produced a new major work he styled it an “introduction” to Phenomenology.

⁴⁸⁶ See Moran, *Husserl*, 16–19, or Stumpf, *Scrates to Sartre*, 491.

⁴⁸⁷ See Husserl, *Phenomenological Psychology*, ix.

beginning.”⁴⁸⁸ The work marks a break from Brentano’s position that psychology is the discipline required for clarifying logical issues.⁴⁸⁹ Instead, Husserl will argue what is needed is a phenomenological philosophy—one that aims at *description* rather than *explanation*.

In the first part of the second volume of the *Logical Investigations*, which Husserl titles ‘Investigations into Phenomenology and the Theory of Knowledge, Part I,’ he writes that with respect to pure logic,

It concerns . . . discussions of a general kind, that of the wider sphere of an objective theory of knowledge (*objectiven Theorie der Erkenntnis*) and, intimately connected with it, a purely descriptive phenomenology (*rein beschreibenden Phänomenologie*) of the experiences belonging to thinking and knowing (*Erkenntniserlebnisse*). It is this whole sphere which must be explored for the purpose of an epistemological preparation and clarification of pure logic.⁴⁹⁰

Husserl intends to uncover an *objective* theory of knowledge—a science of knowledge, as it were—which he thinks must be linked with “a purely descriptive

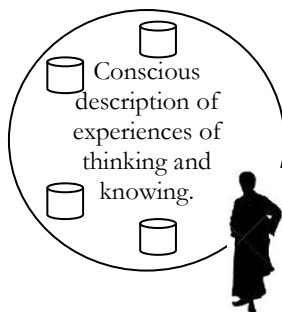
⁴⁸⁸ Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, Foreword to 2nd ed. (Findlay, 3). German: *ein Werk des Durchbruchs, und somit nicht ein Ende, sondern ein Anfang*.

⁴⁸⁹ Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, Foreword to 1st ed., 1–2.

⁴⁹⁰ Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, §1 (Findlay, 166). *Es handelt . . . Erörterungen jener allgemeinesten Art, die zur weiteren Sphäre einer objectiven Theorie der Erkenntnis und, was damit innigst zusammenhängt, einer rein beschreibenden Phänomenologie der Denk- und Erkenntniserlebnisse gehören. Diese ganz Sphäre ist es, die zum Zweck einer erkenntniskritischen Vorbereitung und Klärung der reinen Logik durchforscht werden muß. . . .* The word rendered “knowing,” *Erkenntniserlebnisse*, is a compound of *Erkenntnis* (“knowledge”) and *Erlebnis* (“experience”). The word translated here as “epistemological” is *erkenntniskritischen* (from *erkenntniskritisch*).

phenomenology.”⁴⁹¹ In other words, he says knowledge is dependent upon being able to describe “the experiences belonging to thinking and knowing”—namely, those found in consciousness (*Bewusstseinsstrom*).

So we begin with a simple picture:



Consciousness is always a consciousness of *something*.⁴⁹²

Although the *Logical Investigations* quickly become the touchstone of an emerging phenomenological movement, Husserl himself—as he remarks in the Foreword to the 2nd edition—stays busy studying and elaborating the meaning, method, and range he sees encompassed by Phenomenology.⁴⁹³ Husserl specifically points to his series of volumes under the title *Ideas Per-*

⁴⁹¹ Moran, *Husserl*, 2, writes, “Husserl envisaged *phenomenology* as the descriptive, non-reductive science of whatever appears, in the manner of its appearing, in the *subjective* and *intersubjective* life of consciousness.”

⁴⁹² *Bewusstsein von Etwas*. See Moran, *Husserl*, 52–54.

⁴⁹³ In his translator’s introduction to *Idea of Phenomenology*, Hardy, 1, notes the irony that despite the significance of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*, when in April, 1905 it was announced he was to become an Associate Professor at Göttingen, the appointment was blocked by the Philosophy Faculty on the alleged grounds of a lack of scientific significance.

taining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy (*Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*), the first book of which appears in 1913.⁴⁹⁴

But midway between the first edition of the *Logical Investigations* and the first book of the *Ideas*, in the Spring of 1907, he offers a series of five lectures, later published under the title *Idea of Phenomenology* (*Die Idee der Phänomenologie*). This work introduces Husserl's method of "phenomenological reduction" (or, as sometimes called, "epistemological reduction").

Idea of Phenomenology, in its first lecture, tackles the *problem* of knowledge. He begins by noting the distance between positive science (natural science confining itself to empirical observations and experiments) and philosophical science, which he hopes to develop through Phenomenology.⁴⁹⁵ At this point he is concerned with the naivety that characterizes ordinary thinking (a naivety he will become convinced only grows and becomes more fixed with confidence in natural science). He writes:

The natural mindset is unconcerned about the critique of knowledge (*Erkenntnis kritik*). In the natural state of mind we are intuiting and thinking about the things that are given to us, and given as a matter of course, although in different ways and in different modes of being,

⁴⁹⁴ Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, Foreword to 2nd ed. (Findlay, 3).

⁴⁹⁵ Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*, Lecture I [German ed., 17] (Hardy, 16). The concern with positive science only seems to grow for Husserl with the passage of time, as especially seen in his 1935 *Crisis*. On his final perspective, see Heelan, "Husserl's Later Philosophy."

depending on the knowledge-source and our knowledge-level.⁴⁹⁶

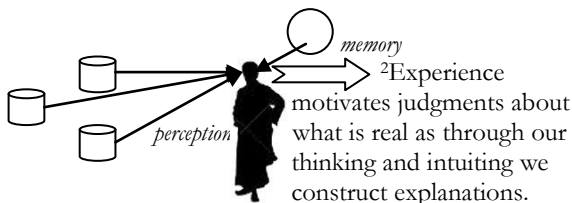
And shortly thereafter he writes:


Our judgments relate to this world. Concerning things, their relations, their changes, their functional dependencies, and laws of change, we make partly singular and partly general statements. We express what direct experience gives us. Following the motives experience itself provides, we infer from what is directly experienced (whether perceived or remembered) things not so experienced; we generalize, then transfer general knowledge to specific cases, or in analytical thinking we deduce from analytical knowledge new generalities. Our findings do not simply follow from insights one after another, they enter into logical relationships with each other; they follow each other, they “agree” with each other, they confirm each other, and thereby they reinforce their logical power.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁶ Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*, Lecture I [German ed., 17] (Hardy, 15): *Natürliche Geisteshaltung ist um Erkenntnis kritik noch unbekümmert. In der natürlichen Geisteshaltung sind wir anschauend und denkend den Sachen zugewandt, die uns jeweils gegeben sind und selbstverständlich gegeben sind, wenn auch in verschiedener Weise und in verschiedener Seinsart, je nach Erkenntnisquelle und Erkenntnisstufe.* “Natural state of mind” translates *natürlichen Geisteshaltung*. The German *anschauend* (“looking”) carries the sense of “intuiting” in Husserl. See Cairns, *Guide*, 7. I have chosen an admittedly stiff way of rendering by the choices of “knowledge-source” (*Erkenntnisquelle*) and “knowledge-level” (*Erkenntnisstufe*) in order to signal the compound nature of these words.

⁴⁹⁷ Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*, Lecture I [German ed., 17] (Hardy, 15): *Änderungsgesetze machen wir teils singuläre, teils allgemeine Aussagen. Wir drücken aus, was uns direkte Erfahrung bietet. Den Erfahrungsmotiven folgend, schließen wir vom direkt Erfahrenen (Wahrgenommenen und Erinnerten) auf nicht Erfahrenes; wir generalisieren, wir über tragen dann wieder allgemeine Erkenntnis auf einzelne Fälle, oder deduzieren im analytischen Denken aus allgemeinen Erkenntnissen neue Allgemeinheiten. Erkenntnisse folgen*

This naïve, but natural thinking looks like this:



¹Objects present themselves (in perception or memory).  **Positive Science**

But in the course of such operations contradictions arise, certainty is undermined, and the notion of actually possessing “knowledge” must be set aside. The very grounds for belief established by experience come undone. Positive science responds by reassessing matters, seeking stronger explanations. A cycle continues as each new certainty of science is shown flawed, falls apart, and is replaced. In this manner positive science and the “natural attitude of thought” (*natürlichen Denkhaltung*) make progress, but without achieving the certainty desired for knowledge. In fact, what is happening is that natural thinking takes for granted the possibility of knowledge and presumes matters related to knowing that become the source of difficulties.⁴⁹⁸

Husserl wants *certainty*, and so he turns to philosophical science. Like Descartes, he wants to make a fresh start, without presuppositions and presumptions. Also like Descartes, that means considering knowledge

nicht bloß auf Erkenntnisse in der Weise der bloßen Aneinanderreihung, sie treten zueinander in logische Beziehungen, sie folgen auseinander, sie „stimmen“ zueinander, sie bestätigen sich, ihre logische Kraft gleichsam verstärkend.

⁴⁹⁸ Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*, Lecture I [German ed., 17–19] (Hardy, 15–17).

and knowing not from the object as starting point, but the Knower. He writes, "In all its forms knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) is a psychological experience. Knowledge belongs to the Knower (*erkennenden Subjekts*)."⁴⁹⁹

He rejects Hume's empiricism and Kant's gap. But he also sets aside positive science. The natural sciences, no less than the efforts of Descartes, Hume, and Kant, only reduce knowledge to a riddle. It falls to philosophical epistemology to take up again the critique of theoretical reason, both exposing and rejecting the errors of natural reflection, and also refuting Skepticism. Along with these 'negative' tasks is a 'positive' one—to solve the problems and probe the very essence of knowledge. Setting aside metaphysics, and focusing on the epistemological task of clarifying the essence of knowledge is the first task of Phenomenology.⁵⁰⁰

This task requires, of course, a *method*.⁵⁰¹ This has more than one aspect. First, Husserl adopts from ancient Skepticism the term *epochē*, by which they meant a 'suspension of judgment.' In his first book of the *Ideas* Husserl likewise calls it a "certain refraining from judgment" (or an "abstention" (*Enthaltung*)). But he employs *epochē* in a more versatile way than did the ancients, especially in calling it a "bracketing" (*Einklammerung*). The metaphorical term, borrowed from ma-

⁴⁹⁹ Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*, Lecture I [German ed., 20] (Hardy, 17): *In allen ihren Ausgestaltungen ist die Erkenntnis ein psychisches Erlebnis: Erkenntnis des erkennenden Subjekts*. "Psychological experience" translated *psychisches Erlebnis*. A "Knower" is a "knowing Subject."

⁵⁰⁰ Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*, Lecture I [German ed., 20–23] (Hardy, 17–19; see 18, on the "riddle of knowledge").

⁵⁰¹ Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*, Lecture I [German ed., 23–26] (Hardy, 19–21).

thematics, is meant to take what is bracketed and assign it a different value. By bracketing he means a setting aside of the natural, but naïve belief that simply assumes reality's existence (*Weltglaube*), a notion he calls the "general thesis" (*Generalthesis*).⁵⁰² The *epochē* is to be applied to anything and everything transcendent.⁵⁰³

Phenomenological method involves what Husserl terms "phenomenological reduction." The individual ("Ego") and personal experience, both existing in objective space and time, are transcendent and thereby subject to the law of *epochē*. Only through reduction can the transcendent be removed and an absolute givenness achieved.⁵⁰⁴

In the first book of *Ideas*, where Husserl presents Phenomenology as a "Pure or Transcendental Phenomenology,"⁵⁰⁵ he says that one must begin with "transcendental-phenomenological-reduction"—a revision of his earlier label—which we will simply term *reduction*.⁵⁰⁶ It is meant in the sense of its Latin root: *reducere*, "to bring back" or "restore"—and what we are led back to is an epistemological purity in which we

⁵⁰² Husserl, *Ideas*, First Book. See Moran, *Husserl*, 7.

⁵⁰³ Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*, Lecture III [German ed., 44] (Hardy, 33–34). "Transcendent" refers to that which goes beyond experience and its phenomena.

⁵⁰⁴ Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*, Lecture III [German ed., 43–45] (Hardy, 33–34; he calls it "epistemological reduction" first (33), then "phenomenological reduction" (34)).

⁵⁰⁵ Husserl, *Ideas*, First Book. Author's Preface to the English Edition (Gibson, 11). "Transcendental" is in a Kantian sense—"both immanent to consciousness and offering the conditions of possibility of experience" (May, *Twentieth Century Continental Philosophy*, 5).

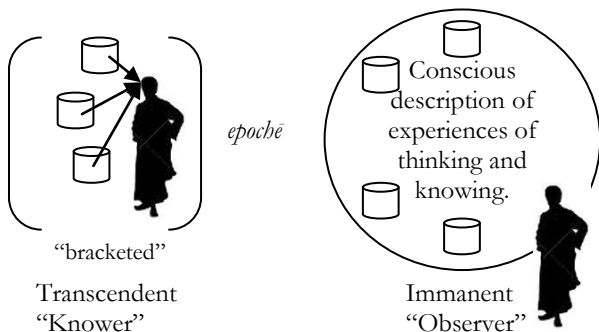
⁵⁰⁶ Husserl, *Ideas*, First Book. Author's Preface to the English Edition (Gibson, 13). On this matter see Schmitt, "Husserl's Transcendental-Phenomenological-Reduction."

suspend judgment on our beliefs about the world and its objects.⁵⁰⁷ In reduction, applying *epochē*, the Knower becomes Observer, a disinterested spectator.⁵⁰⁸

In the third lecture of the *Idea of Phenomenology* Husserl proclaims:

And so we already cast anchor on the shore of Phenomenology, whose objects are set forth as real (*seiend*), just as science so sets the objects of its investigation—but not as existents (*Existenzen*) in an Ego, in a temporal world, but instead in an absolute reality grasped in purely immanent intuiting.⁵⁰⁹

We can now flesh out our earlier picture:



⁵⁰⁷ Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*, Lecture III [German ed., 45] (Hardy, 34). On *reducere*, cf. Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 498.

⁵⁰⁸ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 35 [German ed., 73]. There Husserl contrasts the naïve Ego immersed in the world as “interested” and the phenomenological Ego as “disinterested,” an “onlooker.”

⁵⁰⁹ Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*, Lecture III [German ed., 45] (Hardy, 34 (bottom)): *Und So werfen wir schon Anker an der Küste der Phänomenologie, deren Gegenstände als seiend gesetzt sind, wie Wissenschaft ihre Forschungsobjekte setzt, aber als keine Existenzen in einem Ich, in einer zeitlichen Welt gesetzt sind, sondern im rein immanenten Schauen erfaßte absolute Gegebenheiten . . .* The German verb *seiend* means “being” or “existing,” hence real.

As indicated at the start of our examination of Husserl, he takes from his teacher Brentano the key notion of *intentionality*. The reduction just described uncovers intentionality.⁵¹⁰ When Phenomenology asserts that all consciousness is about *something*, it means that it *intends* some object.⁵¹¹ In fact, when as Observer the person applying the phenomenological method dissects the structure of consciousness (*Bewusstseinszusammenhang*), this intentionality is what most vigorously stands forth.⁵¹² Consciousness intends objects (thus being a *consciousness of something*) as an intentional act.

The structure of consciousness reveals:

1. the *phenomena* appearing in it (*noemata*; sing. *noema*);
2. the *acts* making phenomena appear as they do (*noeses*; sing. *noesis*); and,
3. the *transcendental ego*.

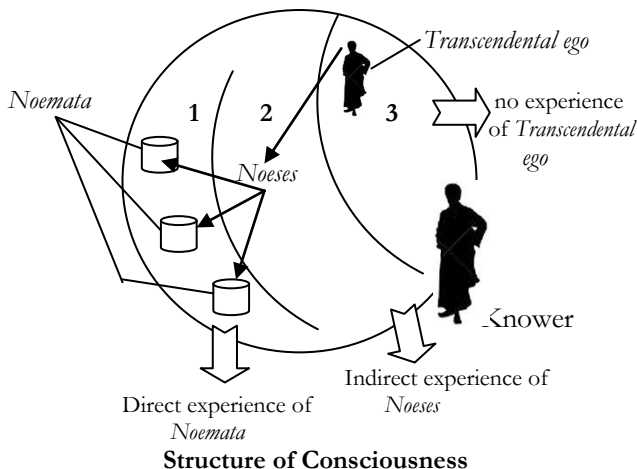
⁵¹⁰ Schmitt, "Husserl's Transcendental-Phenomenological-Reduction," 240, offers this explanation of the label: "The transcendental-phenomenological-reduction is called 'transcendental' because it uncovers the ego for which everything has meaning and existence. It is called 'phenomenological' because it transforms the world into mere phenomenon. It is called 'reduction' because it leads us back (Lat. *reducere*) to the source of meaning and existence of the experienced world, in so far as it is experienced, by uncovering intentionality."

⁵¹¹ Held, "Husserl's Phenomenological Method," 14, puts it well in writing, "Husserl uses the words 'intention' and 'intending' throughout his works in a way similar to our daily usage, indicating a purposeful striving. Intentional consciousness is, in all its forms, focused on finding satisfaction in the intuited self-having of lived experience."

⁵¹² Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre*, 496, remarks, that for Husserl, "intentionality is the structure of consciousness itself and is also the fundamental category of being."

The first two—*noemata* and *noeses*—are coordinated elements in the structure of an intentional act; a *noesis* pairs with a *noema*.⁵¹³ The last element is a formal recognition of an “I” (*Ich*) who judges experience and the objects encountered in it. It is the source of the *noeses*. As the source of the acts of experience it cannot itself be experienced.⁵¹⁴

We are ready for a final picture (paired to our list):



For Husserl, the phenomenological method, by *epoché* and bracketing, ‘returns one’ (*reduction*) to a pure state of consciousness. The knowing within such consciousness is *certain*. This perspective convinces Husserl’s student, Martin Heidegger, who then develops the theory in new directions.

⁵¹³ For more, see Rossi and Shahabi, “Husserl’s Phenomenology.”

⁵¹⁴ See Scmitt, “Husserl’s Transcendental-Phenomenological-Reduction,” 239.

Martin Heidegger's (1889–1976) long relationship with Husserl takes a decisive turn in the mid-1930s, as Nazism rises to power in Germany. Husserl, a Jew, falls into censure while Heidegger, his successor at Freiburg, joins the Nazi party after becoming Rector at the University.⁵¹⁵ Heidegger also succeeds in eclipsing his predecessor in stature as a philosopher. He adopts Phenomenology, but then develops it in a way that proves more influential than what Husserl had accomplished. Heidegger's thinking proves especially influential on the existentialists of the mid-20th century.

Heidegger fits securely in that tradition of German philosophers (extending from Kant through Hegel and Husserl to himself) of authors whose prose is dense and difficult. Heidegger makes Husserl look easy to read. No small measure of the difficulty lies with his penchant for neologisms, but beyond that he often seems to write in a purposefully obfuscating manner.⁵¹⁶ Like Husserl, Heidegger's writings are often divided

⁵¹⁵ The relationship of Heidegger to Nazism has long been controversial. The bare facts are these: after his election as rector of Freiburg he joined the Nazi party, maintaining his membership until the party was officially disbanded at the conclusion of World War II. During his year as rector at Freiburg he supported Nazi educational reforms and cultural programs. His writings contain explicit anti-semitic sentiments. For a detailed look at this matter, see Fariás, *Heidegger and Nazism*. For Heidegger's own defense see Heidegger, with Augstein and Wolf, "Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten." Also see Thomson, "Heidegger and National Socialism."

⁵¹⁶ Mugerauer, "Toward Reading," 143, observes, "His etymologies disturb the scholar; his method of 'argument' wrests a moan from the logician. . . ." Although writing of the later Heidegger, the same sentiments are thought by many to fit across Heidegger's corpus.

into early and later periods—and the later writings are more obscure than the earlier ones.

Heidegger's most renowned work is his 1927 *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*). As the title signals, the work is one of *ontology* (the study of “Being” (*Sein*)). Heidegger's handling of the matter of knowledge is indicated very early on when he addresses Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. “So the positive result of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*,” he writes, “is based on an approach to what belongs to ‘a nature’ (*einer Natur*) in general, and not in a ‘theory’ of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*). His transcendental logic is the *a priori* logic of the area of being (*Seinsgebietes*) called ‘Nature.’”⁵¹⁷ In a bold stroke he thereby turns what others see as an epistemology into an ontology!

Heidegger's review of the last two centuries of philosophy before him finds his predecessors lacking. He complains, “Realism and idealism, with equal thoroughness, miss the meaning of the Greek concept of truth (*Wahrheitsbegriffes*), from which one can only understand the possibility of something like a ‘theory of ideas’ (*Ideenlehre*) as philosophical knowledge (*philosophischer Erkenntnis*).”⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Introduction, I: The Necessity, Structure, and Priority of the Question of Being, ¶3: The Ontological Priority of the Question of Being [German, 10–11] (Macquarrie and Anderson, 31): *So beruht denn auch der positive Ertrag von Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft im Ansatz zu einer Herausarbeitung dessen, was zu einer Natur überhaupt gehört, und nicht in einer »Theorie« der Erkenntnis. Seine transzendente Logik ist apriorische Sachlogik des Seinsgebietes Natur.* With respect to Heidegger on Kant, see Han-Pile, “Early Heidegger's Appropriation of Kant.”

⁵¹⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Introduction, II, ¶7: The Phenomenological Method of Investigation, B: The Concept of the Logos

We shall investigate this charge more closely in a moment, but first we must see where he is headed. He declares, “‘Being’ (*Das Sein*), as the basic theme of philosophy, is not a genus of ‘being,’ and yet it affects every being.”⁵¹⁹ It is, in other words, both universal and higher than some taxonomic classification scheme. Being is, Heidegger says, the “*transcendens*”—transcendent, going beyond all entities and yet common to all.⁵²⁰ Thus, “Every opening up of being (*Sein*) as the *transcendens* is transcendental knowledge (*Erkenntnis*).”⁵²¹

Fully committed to philosophical ontology as he is, Heidegger relegates epistemology itself to, at best, a rear seat—both in *Being and Time*,⁵²² and elsewhere. He

[German, 34] (Macquarrie and Anderson, 57–58): *Realismus und Idealismus verfehlen den Sinn des griechischen Wahrheitsbegriffes, aus dem heraus man überhaupt nur die Möglichkeit von so etwas wie einer »Ideenlehre« als philosophischer Erkenntnis verstehen kann, mit gleicher Gründlichkeit.* Guzzoni, “Summary,” 52, remarks, “One can say that the further one moves away from the beginning of Western thinking, from *aletheia*, the further *aletheia* goes into oblivion; the clearer knowledge, consciousness, comes. To the foreground, and Being thus withdraws itself.”

⁵¹⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Introduction, II, ¶7, C: The Preliminary Conception of Phenomenology [German, 38] (Macquarrie and Anderson, 62): *Das Sein als Grundthema der Philosophie ist keine Gattung eines Seienden, und doch betrifft es jedes Seiende.*

⁵²⁰ On the use and meaning of the term *transcendens* see Aertsen, “‘Transcendens’ in Mittelalter.”

⁵²¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Introduction, II, ¶7, C: The Preliminary Conception of Phenomenology [German, 38] (Macquarrie and Anderson, 62): *Jede Erschließung von Sein als des transcendens ist transzendente Erkenntnis.* Macquarrie and Anderson choose “disclosure” for *Erschließung*, but I think “opening up” better fits the way Heidegger expresses his ideas.

⁵²² For his remarks on knowledge in *Being and Time*, see Part One, Division I: Preparatory Fundamental Analysis of *Dasein*, II: Being-

clearly is not interested in developing an epistemology or theory of knowledge in the way our other figures are.⁵²³ However, that does not mean Heidegger's philosophy is of no significance for our own interest in knowledge.⁵²⁴

First let us examine his negative remarks on epistemology. These are best understood in a context of seeing epistemology as the rival of ontology for a central place in philosophy. He sees hubris in epistemology that arrogantly elevates itself over all else, which of course includes metaphysics and Heidegger's beloved "Being."⁵²⁵ In more than one place Heidegger expresses his disdain for the role epistemology has come to play in modern philosophy. He contends that

in-the-World as the Basic State of *Dasein*, ¶13: A Founded Mode in which Being-In Is Exemplified. Knowing the World [German, 60] (Macquarrie and Anderson, 86–87). Guignon, *Heidegger*, 14, on this section remarks that Heidegger's brief discussion principally argues that the so-called 'problem' of knowledge is a 'pseudo-problem'—and not worth extended consideration.

⁵²³ Bartells, "The Status of Epistemology," 2, comments, "Heidegger *does* frequently criticize epistemology as superficial and totally inadequate to the task he pursues. Moreover, it is certainly true that he never develops an epistemology of his own, nor does he think it necessary or even desirable to do so."

⁵²⁴ Iyer, "Knowledge and Thought," 1, writes that while Heidegger does not consider himself to be an epistemologist and is suspicious of traditional epistemology, what his theoretical framework may "allow us to do is to broaden our conception of knowledge and the knowing subject by attempting to articulate a broader conception of thinking that goes beyond conceptual thinking."

⁵²⁵ Bartells, "The Status of Epistemology," 84, writes of Heidegger's view that, "Epistemology, as the arbiter of what constitutes true knowledge, has set itself up as the final judge over all possible forms of Being and every aspect of human thought. Thus, epistemology is the name for the modern desire to control and dominate Being."

epistemology, rather than providing a foundation for metaphysics is instead riddled with metaphysical assumptions held dogmatically.⁵²⁶

He finds the corruption began a long time ago, with the distortion of what “truth” actually means. In a lecture course in 1931–1932, later published as *The Essence of Truth (Vom Wesen der Wahrheit)*,⁵²⁷ Heidegger traces the etymology of the Greek word *alētheia* (ἀλήθεια), commonly translated as “truth.” He argues that *alētheia* (or, as he styles it, ἄ-λήθεια) is “a word for something first and last,” and “it is a word that constitutes the ground and the vault of human *Dasein*.” The original sense of what is “true,” Heidegger says, is “unhidden.”⁵²⁸ He continues, “*What* is called by the Greeks ἀληθές (unconcealed, true)? Not the assertion, not the principle and not the knowledge (*Erkenntnis*), but the

⁵²⁶ Guignon, *Heidegger*, 13, writes that in Heidegger’s view, “The real scandal of philosophy is the unquestioned centrality and sovereignty of epistemology in recent philosophy.”

⁵²⁷ The full German title is *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit. Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet* (*The Essence of Truth: On Plato’s Cave Allegory and Theaetetus*).

⁵²⁸ Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, Preliminary Considerations, §2: History of the Concept of Truth [German ed., 12] (Sadler, 9): (1st quote): *ein Wort demnach für etwas Erstes und Letztes*; (2nd quote): *ein Wort was für das, Grund und Boden und die Wölbung des menschlichen Daseins ausmacht*. Sadler renders *Erstes und Letztes* as “ultimate and primary,” rather than “first and last.” That catches the sense, if not a literal translation; I prefer “first and last” because it can also be construed as “*alpha* and *omega*”—in short, a word that is the foremost and final one on human *being*. Similarly, *Grund und Boden und die Wölbung* is like the primordial picture in Genesis of the ground beneath man’s feet and the vault of heaven above. Once again the idea is of a word that bounds humanity. Together the picture is one of both time (first and last) and space (below and above).

beings (*Seiende*) themselves, the whole of nature, work of man and action of God.”⁵²⁹ He then explores a saying of Heraclitus before turning to his main focus.

Heidegger examines Plato, focusing first on the allegory of the cave in the *Republic* and then moving on to the *Theaetetus*. His intent is to peel back centuries of interpretation to uncover what he regards as the original meaning of words and texts. Since he is convinced that ancient Greek philosophy is principally about the question of Being, he casts the question of truth (Greek *alētheia*) in the light of ontology rather than epistemology. Thus he argues that the original meaning of *alētheia* “unhiddenness” (= “true”)—applied to beings rather than propositions—begins to be displaced in Plato by a notion of *alētheia* as “correctness,” a sense that leads in time to conceiving of truth as propositions.⁵³⁰

In turning his attention to the *Theaetetus*, Heidegger calls the question “What is knowledge?” “a strange and basically outlandish question,” and then adds the prevailing view that, “Knowledge (*Wissen*) as such—what it is—is the domain of scientific theory (*Wissenschaftstheorie*), whose most universal task is sought in

⁵²⁹ Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, Preliminary Considerations, §2 [German ed., 13] (Sadler, 9): *Wass wird denn von den Griechen ἀληθές (unverborgen, wahr) genannt? Nicht die Aussage, nicht der Satz und nicht die Erkenntnis, sondern das Seiende selbst, das Ganze von Natur, Menschenwerk und Wirken des Gottes.* The German *Aussage* means “statement” or “proposition” but carries the sense here of “assertion.” The word *Erkenntnis*, here translated “knowledge,” we met in connection with Kant, where it was rendered “cognition” (how the mind engages in acts and processes to acquire knowledge).

⁵³⁰ See Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, Preliminary Considerations, §2 [German ed., 7–19] (Sadler, 6–13).

epistemology (*Erkenntnistheorie*).”⁵³¹ He is well aware that his contemporaries see epistemology precisely as the investigation into the meaning of knowledge as such, and to be the one area of knowledge left to philosophical science—and they appeal to Plato for support.

Heidegger complains that this unfortunate situation stems from an error in construing knowledge in terms of *science*.⁵³² He argues that when Plato asks, ‘What is knowledge?’ he means to get at the *essence* of *epistēmē* (ἐπιστήμη). This, Heidegger maintains, is rooted in the original sense of the “*ruling know-one’s-way-around (beherrschende Sich-auskennen)*”—and that this extends across all possible human activities and domains; what we call ‘science’ is just one of these.⁵³³

When Heidegger puts together what he finds in the *Republic* (knowledge as “seeing”) and the *Theaetetus* (knowledge as “to-know-in”), he concludes that in Greek thinking these two senses are unified. Thus, he says, “Knowledge (*Erkennen*) is having-at-present-disposal of being present as such, both when it is

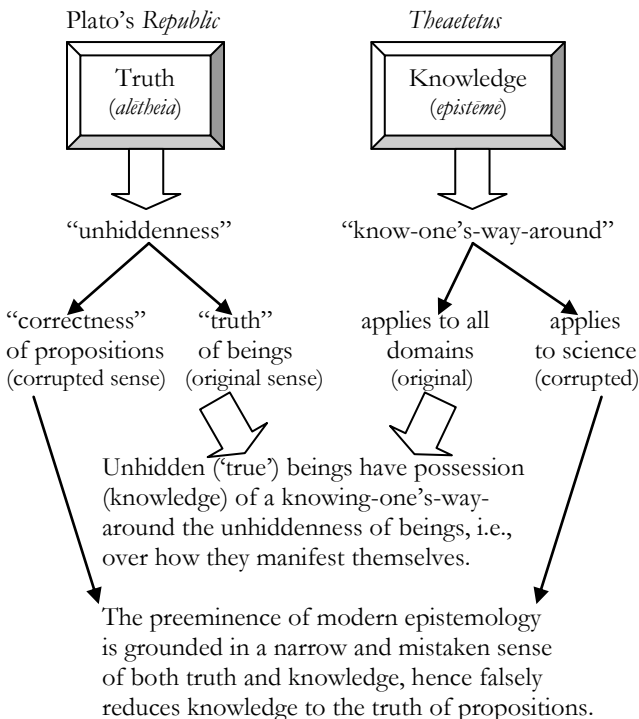
⁵³¹ Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, Preliminary Considerations, §20: The Question concerning the Essence of ἐπιστήμη [German ed., 151] (Sadler, 110): (1st quote) *Eine merkwürdige und im Grunde ausgefallene Frage*. (2nd quote) *Das Wissen als solches, was es sei, ist das Gebeit der Wissenschaftstheorie, deren allgemeinste Aufgabe in einer Erkenntnistheorie gesucht wird*. Sadler renders *Erkenntnistheorie* as “theory of knowledge” and that works well, too. My concern with that choice is possible confusion for English readers with thinking the two words rendered “knowledge” are the same.

⁵³² “Science” (*Wissenschaft*) refers to both natural and social sciences.

⁵³³ Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, Preliminary Considerations, §20 [German ed., 151–54] (Sadler, 111–112). Quote [German ed., 153] (Sadler, 112): *das beherrschende Sich-auskennen in etwas, im Umgang mit einer Sache und in dieser selbst*. (“The *ruling know-one’s-way-around* in something, in dealing with a thing and in itself.”)

present and even when it is absent—indeed, especially when it is *not* available.” Knowledge is linked to truth in that both have to do with the unhiddenness of beings; knowledge has disposal over this un-hiddenness.⁵³⁴

Can we put such thoughts into a picture? Let’s try.



⁵³⁴ Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, Preliminary Considerations, §21: The Greek Concept of Knowledge [German ed., 157–61] (Sadler, 116–117). Quote [German ed., 160–61] (Sadler, 117): *Erkennen ist Gegenwärtig-haben von Anwesendem als solchem, In-seiner-Anwesenheit-zur-Verfügung-haben, selbst wenn es abwesend sein sollte, also auch dann und gerade dann, wenn das einzelne Ding nicht zur Verfügung steht.*

Heidegger's 1935 *What Is a Thing?* (*Die Frage nach dem Ding*)⁵³⁵ starts again with the *Theaetetus* by recounting Plato's story of the philosopher Thales, who fell into a well while preoccupied with studying the heavens, and so earned the laugh of a housemaid who told him that while he sought to know all things, he did not even know what was under his feet. Heidegger concurs with Plato that the jest applies to all philosophers, for falling down deep holes is an occupational hazard. In this case, the hazard comes in considering one of the oldest questions in philosophy, 'What is a *thing*?'⁵³⁶

Since the notion of a 'thing,' like that of 'truth' and 'knowledge,' is basic to considerations of epistemology, what Heidegger has to say in answering this question is pertinent. He points out the word is used in both narrower (i.e., particular things presently at hand) and wider senses (i.e., events and occurrences in general), and that the widest sense entered philosophy in Kant's "thing-in-itself" (*Ding an sich*). He aims at answering the question with respect to the narrower sense.⁵³⁷

But, he hastens to add, what he really is after is not what science already has provided. He wants the 'thingness' (*Dingheit*) of things—what makes a thing a *thing*. He notes this is a presumptuous question, not at all the kind found in science—which he assures us he

⁵³⁵ The full German title is *Die Frage nach dem Ding. Zu Kants Lehre von den transzendenten Grundsätzen* (*The Question Concerning the Thing: On Kant's Doctrine of the Transcendental Principles*.)

⁵³⁶ Heidegger, *What Is a Thing?* A: Various Ways of Questioning about the Thing, §1: Philosophical and Scientific Questioning [German ed., 1–3]. (Barton and Deutsch, 2–3). On Heidegger's use of the ancient Greeks, see White, "Heidegger and the Greeks."

⁵³⁷ Heidegger, *What Is a Thing?* A, §2: Ambiguous Talk about the Thing [German ed., 3–5] (Barton and Deutsch, 4–7).

has no desire to either replace or reform—but it is the kind of question is essential for making a decision:

Is science the benchmark for knowledge, or is there a knowledge in which only the reason and limit of science, and thus its real effectiveness, are determined? Is this actual knowledge necessary for a historical people, or can it be dispensed with and otherwise replaced?⁵³⁸

We cannot here follow all his ensuing consideration of the matter, which again delves into the nature of truth and considers the place of knowledge. His real point, it emerges, is to spark *thinking*, which begins with the *decision* made as to the level of freedom of knowledge a historical being (*Dasein*) will choose, and then, under the inexorableness of *questioning*, the people of an era posit for themselves the degree of their ‘being’ (*Dasein*).⁵³⁹

He points out that we can choose to leave aside the question of our knowledge of things with the hope it will eventually sort itself out on its own. In that spirit we can admire what present science accomplishes without concerning ourselves how it does so—ignoring, for example, that modern science itself would

⁵³⁸ Heidegger, *What Is a Thing?* A, §3: The Differences in Kind between the Question of Thingness (*Dingheit*) and Scientific and Technical Methods [German ed., 5–8] (Barton and Deutsch, 7–10). Quote [German ed., 8] (Barton and Deutsch, 10): *Ist die Wissenschaft der Maßstab für das Wissen, oder gibt es ein Wissen, in dem erst der Grund und die Grenze der Wissenschaft und damit ihre echte Wirksamkeit sich bestimmen? Ist dieses eigentliche Wissen für ein geschichtliches Volk notwendig, oder läßt es sich entbehren und anderweitig ersetzen?* “Science” is *Wissenschaft*; “knowledge” is *Wissen*.

⁵³⁹ Heidegger, *What Is a Thing?* A, §10: The Historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of the Definition of the Thing [German ed., 29–34] (Barton and Deutsch, 41–42).

not exist if not for a dialog initiated long ago by an early passion for questioning the nature of knowledge. Or, he argues, we can commit ourselves to questioning more vigorously than ever.⁵⁴⁰

The answer to the question ‘What is a thing?’ is not to be found in a proposition. Instead, says Heidegger, the answer lies in at least beginning to change, through questioning and evaluation, one’s basic position toward the matter. It is, he puts it in his characteristic way, a matter of “the being-there (*Da-sein*) in the midst of beings (*Seienden*).”⁵⁴¹ Once again, the real substance of the issue lies in ontology rather than epistemology.

But rather than pursue that subject, which is too far removed from our focus, we need to turn now to Heidegger’s positive epistemology, such as it is. We already have seen clues to it. His interest lies not in epistemol-

⁵⁴⁰ Heidegger, *What Is a Thing?* A, §10 (Barton and Deutsch, 42). Heidegger again is interested in not merely recounting a tradition of interpretation on the question but getting back past the tradition to the original inner ‘happening’ of the question (see p. 49). Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* (*Was Heisst Denken?*) Part One, Lecture III (Wieck and Gray, 33, their translation), remarks, “The sciences are fully entitled to their name, which means fields of knowledge, because they have infinitely more knowledge than thinking does. And yet there is another side in every science which that science as such can never reach: the essential nature and origin of its sphere, the essence and essential origin of the manner of knowing which it cultivates, and other things besides.” (Cf. 159). It should be noted that Heidegger has a deep sense that science is itself governed by something other than a mere desire to know, but that we cannot see this as long as we accept conventional notions about science. See Heidegger, “Science and Reflection,” 156.

⁵⁴¹ Heidegger, *What Is a Thing?* A, §12: Historicity and Decision [German ed., 38] (Barton and Deutsch, 50): *des Da-seins inmitten des Seienden*.

ogy or a theory of knowledge, but in thinking and questioning. Heidegger champions “meditative thinking” (*das besinnliche Denken*) as opposed to “calculative thinking” (*das rechnende Denken*). It is to the later Heidegger we must turn to learn more.

About the time the Second World War is ending, in the Spring of 1945, Heidegger writes his *Country Path Conversations* (*Feldweg-Gespräche*).⁵⁴² The choice of “conversation” rather than the more familiar form of a philosophical “dialog” is a conscious one.⁵⁴³ The three participants—a Scholar (*Gelehrte*), Scientist (*der Forscher*), and Guide (*der Weise*, literally, ‘the Sage’)⁵⁴⁴—develop a progressive convergence of thought; the three speakers are really one.⁵⁴⁵

At a key point in the conversation, as he does so often, Heidegger appeals to a Greek word—ἄνχιβασίη (*anchibasiē*)—from a very early thinker, Heraclitus in this case (Fragment 122). The word is explained as meaning “going toward” or, better, “going-up-to” (German *Herangehen*). The Scientist finds this an excellent word for

⁵⁴² A portion of this first appeared in English as “Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking” (Anderson and Freund translators) in a book titled *Discourse on Thinking*. Later the entire work was translated in *Country Path Conversations* (Davis’ translation).

⁵⁴³ In the translation foreword of Heidegger’s *Conversation*, viii, Davis calls attention to Heidegger’s preference of “conversation” (*Gespräch*) to “dialog” (*Dialog*). It is fitting if for no other reason than to help the reader avoid any mistaken connection to the dialog form of Plato.

⁵⁴⁴ In their translation Anderson and Freund use “Teacher” rather than “Guide.”

⁵⁴⁵ Davis, ix n. 7, points out that the title’s “A Triadic Conversation” translates *Ein Gespräch selbstdritt*, with this last word a rarely used one which combines the notion of ‘self’ with ‘three.’

capturing the essence of cognition (or knowledge), and the Scholar concurs.⁵⁴⁶

The Scientist then continues that he thinks it a fitting word for modern science and its calculative thinking because its research is like an attacking “going-up-to” on Nature, even though it still lets Nature speak. The Scholar responds by saying this character of the term is precisely why he earlier refrained from bringing it up. It is the very reason the word does not quite capture the kind of thinking they have been conversing about.⁵⁴⁷

That kind of thinking—meditative thinking—entails “waiting” (*warten*). Earlier, this “waiting” had been tied to another term—“releasement” (*Gelassenheit*), a very important term for Heidegger.⁵⁴⁸ In that earlier part of the conversation the Scientist had said that what *releasement* names is *waiting*, which he then explains relates to *openness*, and which means “open region,” or in Heidegger’s distinctive manner, “that-which-regions” (*die Gegnet*). Waiting is the pivotal relation to “that-

⁵⁴⁶ Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, A Triadic Conversation [German ed., 151–54] (Anderson and Freund, 88–89; Davis, 99–100).

⁵⁴⁷ Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, A Triadic Conversation [German ed., 153–54] (Anderson and Freund, 89; Davis, 100). Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 46, says calculative thinking is intended to serve a particular purpose, have definite results, and involves computations. It is thinking that plans and investigates. Though useful and necessary in its own right, it is not interested in the contemplation of the meaning reigning in everything that *is*.

⁵⁴⁸ Davis, in the translation foreword to Heidegger, *Conversations*, xi, notes that the German word *Gelassenheit* was coined in the 13th century by the Christian mystic Meister Eckhardt.

which-regions” because it releases itself and so allows *die Gegnet* to reign purely.⁵⁴⁹

Now, in the present part of the conversation, having recalled this earlier moment, the Scientist observes that waiting is almost a counter-movement to the “going-up-to” characteristic of scientific thinking (calculative thinking). So they propose to think of *anchibasis* like an ancient Greek would. The Scholar contributes that since it refers to going, it has in mind human movement and that describes a kind of relationship a person has toward what *is*. At the prompting of the Guide the Scholar qualifies the “*is*” as that which “presences” (*Das Anwesende*)—and that means (as we glimpsed earlier in his investigation of *alētheia*) as that which is unhidden. The Scientist sums the matter up as meaning that in this kind of relationship to what *is* a human being moves within the unhiddenness of what presences.⁵⁵⁰

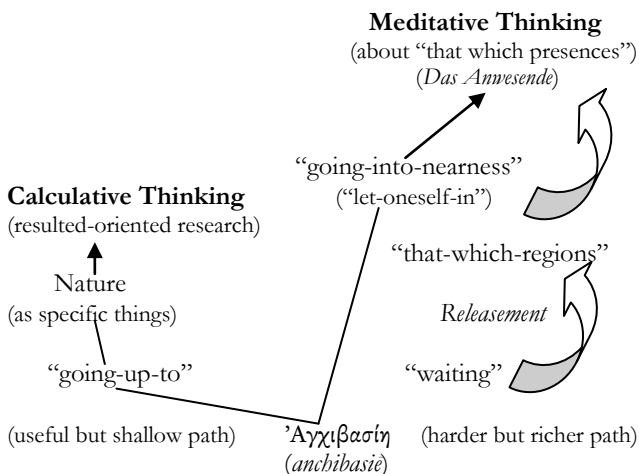
The Guide adds the thought that what presences and is unhidden is *near*, so that a quality of nearness belongs to both being (εἶναι (*enai* as “presencing”)) and

⁵⁴⁹ Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, A Triadic Conversation (Anderson and Freund, 72; Davis, 79–81). Della Pezze, “Heidegger on Gelassenheit,” 106–07, comments, “The word assigned by Heidegger to the region of all regions, to the openness in itself, is an ancient German form for the word *Gegend*, that is, ‘*Gegnet*’. *Gegnet* refers to the acting of *Gegnet* towards the being of Dasein. We could say that *Gegnet* is the essential movement that relates and determines a relation to the being of Dasein.” Davis, in the translation foreword to Heidegger, *Conversations*, xi, comments that “waiting” (*Warten*) refers to “an attentive and engaged openness to an arrival of something unexpected. . . .”

⁵⁵⁰ Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, A Triadic Conversation [German ed., 154–55] (Anderson and Freund, 89; Davis, 101).

truth (*alētheia*). This has now led them to reformulate *anchibasīē*. The Guide suggests that it be understood as “going-into-nearness” (*In-die-Nähe-gehen*). The Scientist adds this really means to “let-oneself-in” (*Sich ein-zulassen*) into nearness. They agree that this sense of *anchibasīē* fits what they are seeking in speaking about meditative thinking.⁵⁵¹

We have a contrast, then, between two paths—two kinds of thinking—we might illustrate this way:



The way of meditative thinking strikes many as a mystical turn in Heidegger. Perhaps it is, but if so it remains logically connected to his lifelong interest in articulating how one might approach Being. For all its merits, the calculative thinking associated with science and epistemology falls short. The higher, harder path, is

⁵⁵¹ Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, A Triadic Conversation [German ed., 155–57] (Anderson and Freund, 89; Davis, 102).

not focused on “knowing” in the calculative manner, but on moving near and within the presence of Being.

Conclusion on Phenomenology

Casual overviews of Phenomenology often portray a closer affinity between Husserl and the early Heidegger than evidence supports. Heidegger served as Husserl’s paid assistant from the beginning of 1919 through the summer of 1923. Even from the start of this period, as found in Heidegger’s lectures in his simultaneous post as lecturer (*Privatdozent*), he distances himself from Husserl. Heidegger cannot follow Husserl’s path, which is epistemological and theoretical. He wants instead an experiential path that is ontological. By the beginning of 1923 he is expressing privately that he finds Husserl ludicrous and not a true philosopher. Though a polite formal relationship is maintained for some time, the idea of any true collegiality is mostly fictional. By the time of the Nazis’ ascension Heidegger is openly anti-Semitic.⁵⁵²

Yet, in the battle for hearts and minds, Heidegger prevails. He becomes for many ensuing thinkers the gatekeeper of Phenomenology—their point of access to its perspective. It is his approach, rather than Husserl’s, that most influences Existentialism and thus part of the reason why he is so often called an existentialist, despite his persistent rejection of the label.⁵⁵³ Taking him at his word means we must turn next to a figure who embraces the label and who is commonly seen as the defining thinker of modern Existentialism.

⁵⁵² See Sheehan, “General Introduction. Husserl and Heidegger.” Also see Crowell, “Heidegger and Husserl.”

⁵⁵³ Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 56.

Existentialism: Sartre

The term “Existentialism” (French *L’existentialisme*) is one first coined in the mid-20th century, at the very blossoming of the movement we have come to know by that name, by a French figure who applies the name to himself—Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973)—and then extends it to a pair of his countrymen, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) and his life-long partner Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986).⁵⁵⁴ Sartre, if at first somewhat grudgingly accepting the label, soon adopts it for himself—and in turn applies it to yet others (e.g., Karl Jaspers, and Marcel).⁵⁵⁵

Among those Sartre names as an existentialist is Martin Heidegger, the renowned phenomenologist. Heidegger, along with the founder of Phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, and Karl Marx (1818–1883), are three primary influences on Sartre. From Husserl and Heidegger he learns a philosophy of Phenomenology, which he then adapts and presents in distinctive manner. Later, from Marx he first gains an interpretation of Hegel, and then adds his existentialist thinking to a Marxist critique of society and human relations.

It may seem odd that neither Kierkegaard nor Nietzsche is among these primary influences, though he is familiar with both and takes from each various notions congenial to his own thinking. For example, he embraces Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity and likewise espouses atheism, though he is not uniformly embracing of Nietzsche’s ideas.⁵⁵⁶ Given Sartre’s own ap-

⁵⁵⁴ Cooper, *Existentialism*, 1.

⁵⁵⁵ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 20 (Macomber trans.).

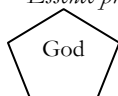
⁵⁵⁶ See Daigle, “Sartre and Nietzsche.”

appropriation of certain matters from Hegel it is not surprising he cannot completely align with the Dane.⁵⁵⁷ Above both figures in his esteem is Marx. Sartre remarks, “Marx, rather than Kierkegaard or Hegel, is right, since he asserts with Kierkegaard the specificity of human *existence* and, along with Hegel, takes the concrete man in his objective reality.”⁵⁵⁸

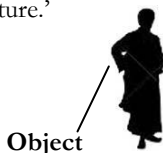
Not long after embracing the label, in a 1947 essay based on a 1945 lecture, Sartre characterizes what unites existentialists: “What they have in common is imply the fact that the believe that existence precedes essence; or, if you will, that we must start from subjectivity.”⁵⁵⁹ It looks like this:

Old View: “Essentialism”

Essence precedes existence.



A Maker creates an *object* for a purpose, which is its ‘nature’ or ‘essence,’ as in ‘human nature.’



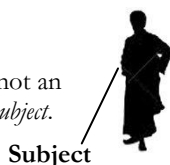
Existentialism

Existence precedes essence.



A person exists, then acts, and by actions shapes his or her own ‘nature’ or ‘essence.’

A person is not an *object*, but a *subject*.



⁵⁵⁷ Sartre, *Search for a Method*, 11 (Barnes’ translation). Sartre observes, “We see that Kierkegaard is inseparable from Hegel, and that this vehement negation of every system can arise only within a cultural field totally dominated by Hegelianism.”

⁵⁵⁸ Sartre, *Search for a Method*, 14 (Barnes’ trans.).

⁵⁵⁹ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (*L’Existentialisme est un humanisme*) [French ed., 17] (Macomber, 20). French (with sentence context): *Ce qu’ils ont en commun, c’est simplement le fait qu’ils estiment que l’existence précède l’essence, ou, si vous voulez, qu’il faut partir de la subjectivité.*

Sartre, like Nietzsche, has no place for God as an explanatory cause. The Christian view typically regards human beings as created objects with an essential nature ‘created in God’s image.’⁵⁶⁰ That view generally continues with the story of that nature being corrupted by sin,⁵⁶¹ meaning, as a popular 19th century rhyme has it, “In Adam’s fall, we sin all.” Not only is the result that human beings are objectified, but they are also seen as *inherently* flawed by an essence of ‘sin nature.’

A focus on subjectivity, Sartre argues, makes Existentialism the only philosophy that endows humanity with dignity—and preserves a person as *subject* rather than as an *object*. Each existing subject creates her or his own nature by virtue of an absolute freedom of choice. As Sartre puts it in announcing Existentialism’s ‘first principle’:

Man is not only that which he sees himself to be, but that which he wants himself to be, and inasmuch as he conceives himself only after he exists, just as he wills himself to run toward being (*l’existence*), so he is nothing other than what he does.⁵⁶²

The human being as subject is key to Sartre’s epistemology. He calls subjectivity “a standard of truth” (*à titre de vérité*), both for oneself and for others. He contends, “In saying, ‘I think,’ contrary to the philosophy of Descartes, and contrary to Kant, we each reach our-

⁵⁶⁰ Genesis 1:27 in the Christian Bible’s Old Testament.

⁵⁶¹ Genesis 3.

⁵⁶² Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* [French ed., 22] (Macomber, 22): *L’homme est non seulement tel qu’il se conçoit, mais tel qu’il se veut, et comme il se conçoit après l’existence, comme il se veut après cet élan vers l’existence, l’homme n’est rien d’autre que ce qu’il se fait.*

selves in the presence of the other, and the other is as certain for us as we are for ourselves.”⁵⁶³

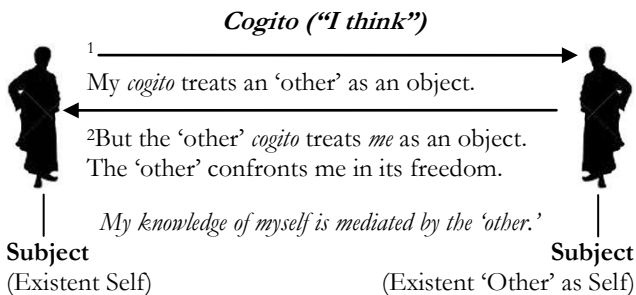
This does *not* mean Sartre dismisses the role of objects or objectivity. Indeed, these play a crucial part since all people inevitably objectify others. The complex *intersubjectivity* existing among people means both that each individual existence depends on the existence of others and that no knowledge of the self is possible apart from others who mediate it. There thus arises awareness that the ‘other’ exists in a freedom that confronts the self. Each of us in creating our own essence, or nature, is also shaping others. Accordingly, even as the individual decides his or her own nature—and it is truly unique—that person nevertheless shares a *common human condition*, a set of limitations that means each and every person must be in this intersubjective world from birth until death. Moreover, the limitations of the human condition are objectively true for everyone while subjectively relevant as personally experienced.⁵⁶⁴

Although this perspective has many ramifications, not least among them is what it means for understanding knowledge. Like many other epistemologists since Descartes, Sartre finds he cannot divorce epistemology from psychology. In Existentialism this is raised to new heights because the subject—the actual existing individual—is at the center. But contrary to the often held perception of Existentialism as merely about the indi-

⁵⁶³ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, [French ed., 66] (Macomber, 41): *Par le je pense, contrairement à la philosophie de Descartes, contrairement à la philosophie de Kant, nous nous atteignons nous-mêmes en face de l'autre, et l'autre est aussi certain pour nous que nous-mêmes.*

⁵⁶⁴ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (Macomber, 41–42).

vidual in isolation, Sartre emphasizes the role of intersubjectivity. We may picture his thinking this way:



Sartre, of course, has much more than just epistemology in mind. Indeed, of all the existentialists he might well be argued to be the one figure who most articulates a ‘system’ of Existentialism. It is as impossible with Sartre as any other major philosopher to separate his ideas on knowledge (*connaissance*) from other matters, such as ethics.⁵⁶⁵ Yet because our focus remains on this one limited part we shall pursue the somewhat foolhardy endeavor to do exactly that in order to stay on our appointed task.

Sartre’s 1943 *Being and Nothingness* (*L’Être et le néant*) is regarded as his *magnum opus* and not uncommonly referred to as the definitive expression of existentialism. In this large volume he has much to say about knowledge, a matter which is talked about throughout his

⁵⁶⁵ Barnes, in her “Translator’s Introduction” to Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, ix, fairly remarks, “One may at will accept or reject this system, but one is not justified in considering any of its parts in isolation from the whole.” In the Washington Square Press/Pocket Books release of this translation the Introduction begins on page 3.

work. Let us begin by noting that his volume's subtitle reads, "A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology."

Ontology, the study of "being" belongs to metaphysics, while phenomenology belongs to epistemology, and so his project has contact with that long line of philosophical inquiries into if and how we are able to know reality and, if so, what reality *is* in relation to what it *appears to be*.

His introduction to *Being and Nothingness* is instructive. Sartre's first sentences applaud modern philosophy for its efforts in overcoming certain dualisms through attention to the monism of "the phenomenon" (*du phénomène*), a move that in effect reduces "the existent" (*l'existant*) to "the series of appearances" (*la série des apparitions*) which serve to display it to an observer.⁵⁶⁶

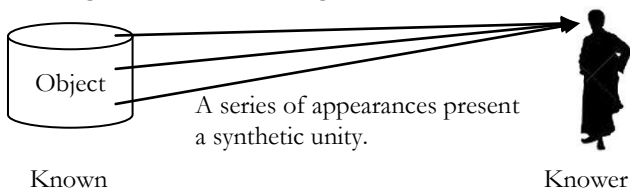
Kant's gap between *Phaenomena* and *Noumena* is gone because the dualism it presents has been eliminated. An "appearance" is not some covering that hides the "existent" behind or inside it. Instead, "appearance" now means "the total series of appearances" so that there is no inconsistent manifestation of the *being* of an existent object. Indeed, the appearing of an essence is "the measure of it" (*est la mesure*). Thus, we arrive at the kind of thinking articulated in the Phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger that Sartre expresses in what we can set as a sort of formula:

$$Is \text{ (existent object's 'being')} = \textit{Appears to be}$$

⁵⁶⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Introduction: The Pursuit of Being, §1: The Phenomenon (Barnes, xlv). The opening sentences read: *La pensée moderne a réalisé un progrès considérable en réduisant l'existant à la série des apparitions qui le manifestent. On visait par là à supprimer un certain nombre de dualismes qui embarrassaient la philosophie et à les remplacer par le monisme du phénomène.*

The phenomenon is thereby a “relative absolute” (*relative-absolu*), one relative in not pointing in two directions—both back at some hidden essence and also toward some observer—but *relative only to the observer*. To itself it is absolute (which means it has independent being but no relationship to itself).⁵⁶⁷

This understanding also eliminates another dualism, that which posits both a potency and actual act. Because a thing is as it appears to be, and that appearance is the total series of appearances, what a thing *is* can only be its *act*—or, to put it differently, there is a “synthetic unity” (*l’unité sythétique*) in the appearances, which means the entire series of appearances is *one* “appearance.” This single, synthetic appearance, says Sartre, is why Husserl is right that one can have an “intuition” (*intuition* = German *Wesensschau*) of the essence, or being, of an existent thing.⁵⁶⁸ It looks like this:



The object known still transcends our knowledge of it.

⁵⁶⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Introduction, §1 (Barnes, xlv–xlv). “Total series of appearances”: *L’apparence renvoie à la série totale des apparences*. To speak of a “measure” typically means addressing the matter of a *criterion*. The ‘formula’ presented is, in French, *Car l’être d’un existant, c’est précisément ce qu’il paraît*—“For the being of an existent is precisely what it *seems*” (my translation). Barnes’ translation is similar, but substitutes “appears” for “seems”; I think varying the English word better accents Sartre’s own emphasis here.

⁵⁶⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Introduction, §1 (Barnes, xlv).

The introduction of the term *intuition* is important because it can be well-argued that intuition is the key to Sartre's theory of knowledge.⁵⁶⁹ Thus, later on Sartre in discussing knowledge starts by declaring, "There is only intuitive knowledge (*connaissance*)."⁵⁷⁰ But what does this mean? Sartre rejects Husserl's definition, which concurs with the traditional one in philosophy, that an intuition is an immediate, personal, and compelling presence of an object in consciousness—a presence to consciousness.⁵⁷⁰

Before we comment on Sartre's rejection of this view we must pause to consider this word "consciousness," which is of immense significance for him. In §3 of the Introduction to *Being and Nothingness*, he remarks that knowledge refers to consciousness (awareness). Sartre means that what one has perceived (Latin *percipi*), or "known," is what one has learned (Latin *percipiens*), or "knowledge," and this refers to the *being* who knows—the Knower—as *subject*, not as the object of knowledge. The knowing subject is the conscious subject. Consciousness is always of *something*.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁹ Hatzimoyisis, "Knowledge," 144, identifies "three Pillars" of Sartre's theory of knowledge: "Knowledge worthy of its name is intuitive; any non-intuitive relation to an object is withdrawn as soon as intuition is attained; and intuition concerns the presence of consciousness to its object."

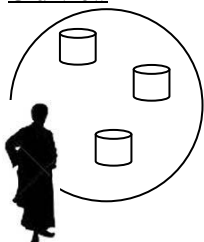
⁵⁷⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Part 2, Chapter 3: Transcendence, §1: Knowledge as a Type of Relation between the For-Itself and the In-Itself (Barnes, 172). The French title for the section is *La connaissance comme type de relation entre le pour-soi et l'en-soi. La connaissance comme type de relation entre le pour-soi et l'en-soi*.

⁵⁷¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Introduction, §3: The Pre-reflective *Cogito* and the Being of the *Percipere* (Barnes, li). Sartre calls consciousness "the dimension of transphenomenal being in the subject."

Sartre's actual position is more radical than the above might make it seem.⁵⁷² Consciousness begins with perceptual awareness. But it is obviously more than just that. Consciousness reveals the *existence* (or "being") of the things perceived and not their *essence* (which Husserl thinks). Consciousness is first awareness of the external existent—the object in its being—and secondarily an awareness of itself.⁵⁷³

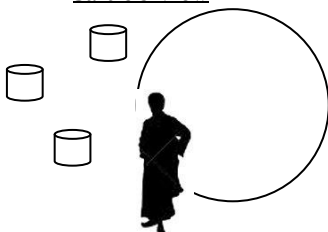
He argues that philosophy must eradicate the notion of objects *in* consciousness in order to identify its true relation to the world, which is "positional" in nature. What he means by this strange word choice is that consciousness is intentional, and further that it *posits* a "transcendent object"—i.e., an object outside consciousness.⁵⁷⁴ This can be pictured this way:

Old View



Objects are *in* consciousness

Sartre's View



Objects are *transcendent*,
i.e., outside consciousness

⁵⁷² Tremault, "Sartre's 'Alternative,'" 24, says he sees *Being and Nothingness* as "an attempt to radicalize the idea of 'intentionality' . . ."

⁵⁷³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Introduction, §2 (Barnes, xlviii–l). At the section's beginning he talks about "an appearance of being."

⁵⁷⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Introduction, §3 (Barnes, l–li). See Rowlands, "Sartre, Consciousness, and Intentionality." Also see Hatzimoysis, "Knowledge," 148–49.

But look what this means: *consciousness has no content*. It is, in itself, *nothing*. The objects, on the other hand, are *something*. They are real (have “being”) and are independent of consciousness.

As we saw, Sartre disagrees with Husserl’s conception of intuition. To grasp why we must introduce his important idea that “being” exists in two ways, or as Sartre puts it, “two absolutely separated regions of being”:

1. as “being-in-itself” (*l’être-en-soi*), and
2. as “being-for-itself” (*l’être-pour-soi*).

The former is foundational in that the latter depends upon it for its very existence.⁵⁷⁵

In §6 of the Introduction, Sartre offers about the “phenomenon of being” (*phénomène d’être*) that as consciousness presents itself to an object—an “existent”—that object never completely reveals itself. It is more than the sum and series of appearances to consciousness. The being of the existent that does not reveal itself is what Sartre calls *being-in-itself*, often referred to by a short form of the full French expression: *en-soi*.⁵⁷⁶

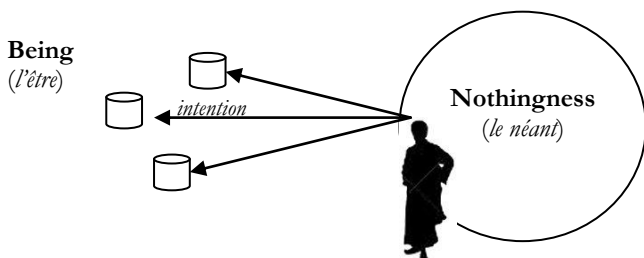
The *being-for-itself*, also commonly referred to by a shortened form, *pour-soi*, is the focus of Part 2 of *Being and Nothingness*. The *pour-soi* is conscious being, the human individual, who is aware both of objects and itself. The *pour-soi* brings order and arrangement to the world. Sartre refers to it as “the being of the *cogito*.”⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Introduction, §6 (Barnes, lxiii). Catalano, *Commentary*, 42 n. 15 remarks on the relation of the terms to Hegel’s dialectic and how Sartre’s usage varies.

⁵⁷⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Introduction, §6 (Barnes, lxii–lxiii).

⁵⁷⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Part 2, Chapter 1, §5 (Barnes, 104).

We must now amend our previous illustration:

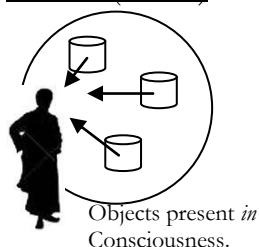


Being-in-itself (*en-soi*) is unconscious and transcendent.

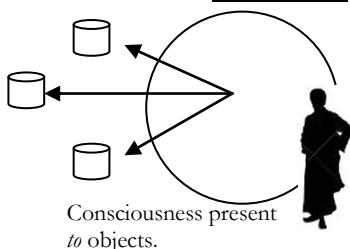
Being-for-itself (*pour-soi*) is conscious and intentional.

Now we can return to Sartre's notion of intuition. He rejects Husserl's idea that intuition is the presence of an object to consciousness. Instead, Sartre contends, "intuition is the presence of consciousness to the thing."⁵⁷⁸ We may contrast them pictorially:

Old View (Husserl)



Sartre's View



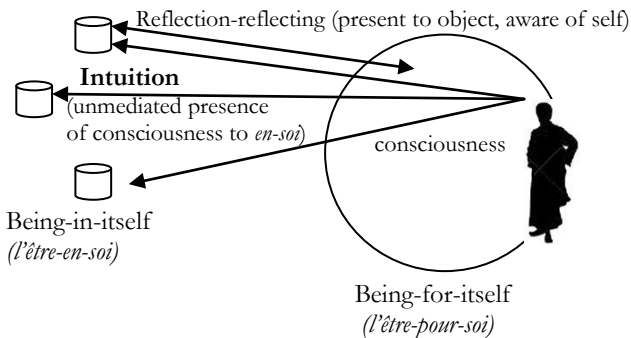
When Sartre declares, as we saw earlier, that there is only *intuitive* knowledge, and then immediately takes up deduction and discursive arguments as other alleged kinds of knowledge, he has in mind Descartes. He both rejects non-intuitive knowledge and argues in contrast

⁵⁷⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Part 2, Chapter 3, §1 (Barnes, 172).

to Descartes that things like deduction at best leads toward intuition (rather than follows from it, as Descartes argued), and once intuition is achieved, it needs no supplement.⁵⁷⁹

For Sartre, knowledge (*connaissance*) is intuition, an unmediated presence of consciousness to an object. Being nothing in itself, consciousness (*pour-soi*) first is directed by the object (*en-soi*) and in its intending of the object reveals it. Sartre speaks of a dual “reflection-reflecting,” by which he means that consciousness is a reflection of the very object to which it is present and reflecting. Put less difficultly, as consciousness is present *to* an object it is aware *of* itself. Though not directed to itself, in intending an object and being present to it the consciousness becomes being-for-itself.⁵⁸⁰

So knowledge looks like this:



⁵⁷⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Part 2, Chapter 3, §1 (Barnes, 172). See Hatzimoysis, “Knowledge,” 146. He points out that Sartre is focused on *connaissance*, knowledge of objects and persons, rather than *savoir*, the French term used for knowing as expressed in true propositions.

⁵⁸⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Part 2, Chapter 3, §1 (Barnes, 172–80). See Hatzimoysis, “Knowledge,” 148–49.

As opposed to mere propositional content (knowledge as *le savoir*), *connaissance* is knowledge as a way of being—an activity—through presence. It is not so much a matter of acquiring information and expressing it accurately, but instead being present in the world in a manner that is aware of both self and other (objects and people). Such a position is congruent with an emphasis on the Knower—the subject who is conscious and a being-for-itself. Sartre goes on to elaborate what this means in ‘the world’ and with other people. But that extends us more into ethics, as always the partner of epistemology, but a reach beyond those matters intended here for study.

Sartre’s phenomenological approach is his effort to describe what appears to consciousness. The Knower is first an observer. The being-*for-itself* is dependent on the being-*in-itself* because there must be something (the *en-soi*) to observe and describe for consciousness (the *pour soi*). The Knower-as-observer describes what appears and thereby reveals what is real.

The interaction of the *pour-soi* with the *en-soi* creates the ‘world.’ But this interaction, or relationship, is not of object-to-object; it is of subject (*pour soi*)-to-object (*en soi*).⁵⁸¹ That means this relationship creates a world of *meaning* within which every person lives among others even while experiencing the anguish of her or his solitary responsibility for all the choices that constitute a human nature.

⁵⁸¹ Catalano, *Commentary*, 43, reminds us, “We are not referring to things and minds existing independently of each other and related merely externally to each other as one complete entity to another complete entity—as, for example, a chair is merely externally related to a table.”

Consistent with characterizing Existentialism as a perspective and movement rather than philosophical school, we see significant diversity among existential thinkers with respect to how they conceive knowing and knowledge. But there are some important matters they agree upon.⁵⁸²

First, they all agree that epistemology must start with the Knower—as subject and not as an object—and they agree that *subjectivity* defines epistemology. They vary in how they elaborate this matter, with the existentialists of the mid-20th century typically drawing on Phenomenology, particularly that of Heidegger.

Second, and concurrent with the first point, they agree that traditional ways of understanding the *subject-object split* must be replaced. Existentialists reject any epistemological primacy of the object. Though in Sartre the being-in-itself of real external objects precedes the being-for-itself, it is the latter with its intuition that provides knowledge.

Third, consistent with this second point, they resist *dualistic thinking* in general, especially the split between what *is* (reality) and what *appears to be* (phenomena), and the mind-body split so prominent since Descartes. This last named has not been touched upon here but has important consequences for the matter of how people objectify one another and come into a perception of themselves as objects. This is an aspect of epistemology crucial to ethics.

⁵⁸² For a comparison/contrast presentation of existential thinkers (including Heidegger) on the subject of knowledge, see Sanborn, *Existentialism*. With respect to opposition to dualisms indicated in my list, see her remarks on pages 55–56.

Chapter 14

Pragmatism

While Phenomenology and Existentialism swept across the philosophical landscape of Continental Europe in the 20th century things were different elsewhere. In the late 19th and early 20th century, two very different philosophical approaches developed in the English-speaking world. Each in its own way returned to prominent attention the question of *what* it is that a knower might know and *how* that is known.

Both Pragmatism and Logical Positivism are weary with a 'business as usual' approach to philosophy, one that extols highly individual systems by creative thinkers, rich in speculation and replete with idiosyncratic technical vocabularies. In place of these both new approaches propose moving philosophy closer to the way things are done in the natural sciences. They want tighter language, better logic, and streamlined methodologies that as in natural sciences lend themselves to verification.

Although there are noteworthy differences between these two approaches, it has been argued that by the 1930s in the United States there was a kind of convergence in American philosophy of the two currents.⁵⁸³ We shall not explore such connections here.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸³ Richardson, "Engineering Philosophy of Science."

⁵⁸⁴ See Ingram, "Late Pragmatism" for more on this matter.

Three American thinkers are most identified with the development of a philosophy of pragmatism in its so-called “classical” period: Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. Pragmatism is a thoroughly American philosophy, utilitarian in interests and focus, and an epistemology that develops both its own theory of knowledge and an accompanying test of truth.

Charles Sanders Peirce

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) is the founder of Pragmatism.⁵⁸⁵ A prodigious writer over the course of nearly six decades, his printed works alone amount to thousands of pages—and represent a small portion of all he wrote.⁵⁸⁶ We shall look at only a few pieces.

Perhaps Peirce’s most famous essay is his 1878 paper “How to Make Our Ideas Clear.” Even as he introduces the name Pragmatism, he is setting forth what makes its most notable saying, the so-called *Pragmatic Maxim*: “Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of those effects is the whole of our conception of the object.”⁵⁸⁷

The idea receives more elaboration in his 1905 article titled “What Pragmatism Is.” Pierce explains how he was drawn to the philosophizing of Kant, Berkeley and Spinoza because they seemed to exhibit a more

⁵⁸⁵ It should be noted, though, that in the last decade of his life Peirce preferred to style his perspective as ‘pragmaticism’ in order to better distinguish it from the position of his peer, William James, who made Pragmatism more famous.

⁵⁸⁶ Brent, *Charles Sanders Peirce*, 8.

⁵⁸⁷ Peirce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” II (end), 293.

experimental manner of thinking. In response to their influence he then endeavored to frame a theory that:

a conception, that is, the rational purport of a word or other expression, lies exclusively in its conceivable bearing upon the conduct of life; so that, since obviously nothing that might not result from experiment can have any direct bearing upon conduct, if one can define accurately all the conceivable experimental phenomena which the affirmation or denial of a concept could imply, one will have therein a complete definition of the concept, and *there is absolutely nothing more in it*. For this doctrine he invented the name *pragmatism*.⁵⁸⁸

Peirce adds, “Now quite the most striking feature of the new theory was its recognition of an inseparable connection between rational cognition and rational purpose; and that consideration it was which determined the preference for the name *pragmatism*.”⁵⁸⁹ If we put this into a formula we would have the following:

Rational cognition \longrightarrow Rational purpose \longrightarrow Conduct of life = Pragmatism

In short, he argues *words and thinking have meaning proportional to the conduct they produce*. He desires to develop philosophy to be like the natural sciences in method, where theories are tested with verification of experiential predictions. In such a philosophy its technical nomenclature would be filled with terms whose single and definite meanings enjoy universal approval.⁵⁹⁰

Peirce says any list of propositions for Pragmatism would fall under a general maxim: “Dismiss make-

⁵⁸⁸ Peirce, “What Pragmatism Is,” 162–63.

⁵⁸⁹ Peirce, “What Pragmatism Is,” 163.

⁵⁹⁰ Peirce, “What Pragmatism Is,” 163–65.

believes.” Among such ‘make-believes’ are proposals to start from a certain state of mind—which Peirce argues no person ever is actually in. He says, “[T]here is but one state of mind from which you can ‘set out,’ namely, the very state of mind in which you actually find yourself at the time you do ‘set out,’—a state in which you are laden with an immense mass of cognition already formed. . . .”⁵⁹¹

The idea of *pre-existing cognition* is epistemologically foundational. In an 1883 essay he characterizes Nature as a vast and unclearly arranged source of facts, but human beings are equipped to “come to it with special aptitudes for guessing right.” Like all animals, they derive through natural selection two *adaptive classes of ideas*:

1. notions of force, matter, space and time; and,
2. notion of what their fellow beings are and how they will act on given occasions.

“Man,” Peirce writes, “has thus far not attained to any knowledge that is not either mechanical or anthropological in its nature, and it may be reasonably presumed that he never will.”⁵⁹²

We must place side-by-side two propositions:

1. all knowledge is based on *experience*; and
2. all knowledge is “but the development of our inborn animal instincts.”⁵⁹³

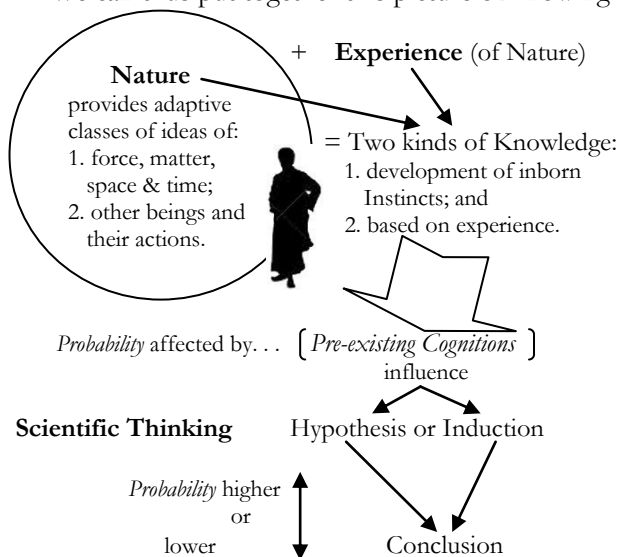
⁵⁹¹ Peirce, “What Pragmatism Is,” 167. On Cartesian doubting, see Peirce, *Chance, Love and Logic*, Proem, 2. Thus he dismisses both Descartes’ rationalistic starting point and that of the empiricists.

⁵⁹² Peirce, “A Theory of Probable Inference,” 180–81. Quotes from p. 180 and p. 181, respectively.

⁵⁹³ Peirce, “Theory of Probable Inference,” 181.

In this context, then, he can remark, “In almost every case in which we make an induction or a hypothesis, we have some knowledge which renders our conclusion antecedently likely or unlikely.” At the same time, he continues, we also quite often have some other knowledge which, even though not directly bearing on how a scientific argument is decided, still can alter our inference, or make it more or less probable.⁵⁹⁴

We can thus put together this picture of knowing:



Every conclusion is a logically quantified addition to knowledge that expresses a higher or lower degree of probability. In this manner scientific thinking and its knowledge are a *process*—more *knowing* than *knowledge*, at least insofar as being any static body of propositions.

⁵⁹⁴ Peirce, “Theory of Probable Inference,” 169.

This *probabilistic nature of scientific thinking* greatly interests Peirce, who styles himself first and foremost as a logician. In an 1878 paper he considers that science aims at quantifying its findings, and given the nature of the scientific method that means expressing the ‘chance’ that a finding corresponds to the reality it describes or measures. So science uses probabilities, and the theory of probability is “the science of logic quantitatively treated.”⁵⁹⁵

But there is more involved. In a paper entitled “The Probability of Induction,” Peirce notes a conceptualist view of probability that probability is “simply the degree of belief which ought to attach to a proposition.”⁵⁹⁶ He later adds:

Probability and chance undoubtedly belong primarily to consequences, and are relative to premises; but we may, nevertheless, speak of the chance of an event absolutely, meaning by that the chance of the combination of all arguments in reference to it which exist for us in the given state of our knowledge. Taken in this sense it is incontestable that the chance of an event has an intimate connection with the degree of our belief in it.⁵⁹⁷

Peirce often speaks of both *belief* and *doubt*—and both of these in relation to *truth*. He specifies that by “belief” he simply means a “contrary to doubt,” regardless of degree of certainty. Belief, he argues, is a habit,

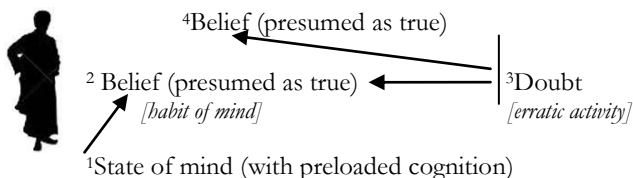
⁵⁹⁵ Peirce, *Chance, Love and Logic*, The Doctrine of Chances, 61–81. The quote is from p. 64. (N.B. The material preceding page numbers are to particular essays and their parts.)

⁵⁹⁶ Peirce, *Chance, Love and Logic*, The Probability of Induction, II, 84.

⁵⁹⁷ Peirce, *Chance, Love and Logic*, The Probability of Induction, II, 87.

and doubt is the privation of a habit. He asserts, “All you have any dealings with are your doubts and beliefs, with the course of life that forces new beliefs upon you and gives you power to doubt old beliefs.” Doubts are superseded by the habit of belief.⁵⁹⁸

We may pause to picture this as follows:



In general, Pierce thinks that *beliefs are rules for action*.⁵⁹⁹ They stand between thought and act. Ideas have consequences, and if nothing else beliefs are *very* consequential ideas. In his paper “How to Make Ourselves Clear,” Peirce summarizes three properties of belief:

1. it is something that we are aware of;
2. it appeases the irritation of doubt; and,
3. it involves the establishment in our nature of a rule of action, or, a habit.

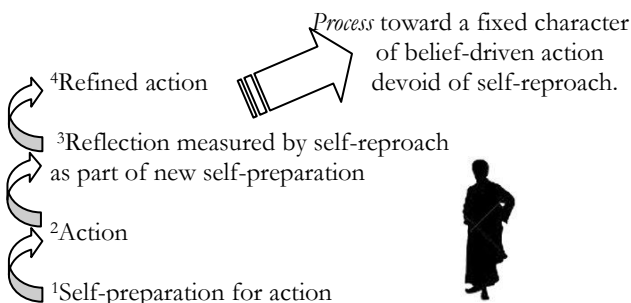
The third of these establishes belief as *believing*, an on-going process of thinking. As a rule of action, belief raises doubt, which prompts further thought; belief is thereby not just a stopping place, but a starting point for further reflection.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁸ Peirce, “What Pragmatism Is,” 167–69. Quotes from p. 168.

⁵⁹⁹ Peirce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear.”

⁶⁰⁰ Peirce, *Chance, Love and Logic*, How to Make Our Ideas Clear, II, 41.

Alongside the habit of belief exists *a degree of self-control over future actions*. By this idea he means that self-preparation lends to future action a certain fixed character, which after action is measured by the degree of self-reproach for the action felt upon reflection. This then becomes part of the self-preparation for the next action. Over time this process tends indefinitely to a perfection of that fixed character marked by an absence of subsequent self-reproach.⁶⁰¹ It looks like this:



Thinking is one kind of conduct subject to self-control—and logical self-control mirrors ethical self-control. (To put it another way, we *act* as we *think*.) What one thinks, one believes to be true, until one's thinking changes. All rational life is like this, Peirce asserts. Experiments of thinking are one such operation of thought. "Of course," he continues, "that ultimate state of habit to which the action of self-control ultimately tends, where no room is left for further self-control, is, in the case of thought, the state of fixed belief, or perfect knowledge."⁶⁰²

⁶⁰¹ Peirce, "What Pragmatism Is," 169–70.

⁶⁰² Peirce, "What Pragmatism Is," 169–70. Quote is from p. 170.

In another paper, Peirce explains he uses the terms doubt and belief, not in a religious sense, but “to designate the starting of any question, no matter how small or how great, and the resolution of it.”⁶⁰³

“Our beliefs guide our desires and shape our actions,” Peirce maintains. He contends that beliefs don’t necessarily make people act immediately, but rather predispose us to certain behavior when the time is right. In contrast, doubt motivates one at once but only for as long as it takes to be dispelled. Doubt is resolved by coming to a state of belief ‘inquiry.’ Once a belief state is reached, if it be firm, it matters not whether the belief itself is true or false for the person is satisfied. The most one can honestly hope for is that people will seek beliefs they think are true.⁶⁰⁴

Pierce notes a number of different methods are used in attaining a belief state. He names four:

1. the method of *tenacity*;
2. the method of *authority*;
3. the *a priori* method; and,
4. the method of *science*.

Some settle on a position they want to belief, constantly reaffirm it, and screen out anything that might disturb it. He styles this method *the method of tenacity*. It ultimately falls because, Peirce says, “The man who adopts it will find that other men think differently from him, and it will be apt to occur to him in some saner

⁶⁰³ Peirce, *Chance, Love and Logic*, How to Make Our Ideas Clear, II, 38.

⁶⁰⁴ Peirce, *Chance, Love and Logic*, The Fixation of Belief, IV, 14–16.

moment that their opinions are quite as good as his own, and this will shake his confidence in his belief.”⁶⁰⁵

Individual belief gives way to communal convictions through social institutions, most notably religion. This institution aims to establish what is correct belief, keep attention directed to it, and inculcate it in the young, all the while also preventing contrary doctrines from receiving the same social advantages. This is *the method of authority*. But no religion can regulate all opinions.⁶⁰⁶

The inability to regulate all opinions isn’t a problem so long as people within a society have a uniform culture where only one way of looking at things pertains. But there are always at least a few who notice that people in other cultures believe differently and the thought occurs to them that their beliefs may be merely the result of an accident of birth. They conclude this fact provides no basis upon which to judge their own views as superior to those of others. This raises doubts about all beliefs, since they all seem to arise from the accident of whatever culture one has been born into and whatever education one has received. They finally decide some other manner of fixing belief must be found.⁶⁰⁷

This new method—an *a priori method*—operates this way: “Let the action of natural preferences be unimpeded, then, and under their influence let men conversing together and regarding matters in different lights, gradually develop beliefs in harmony with natural causes.” Metaphysical philosophy provides an example of

⁶⁰⁵ Peirce, *Chance, Love and Logic*, The Fixation of Belief, V, 19–20.

⁶⁰⁶ Peirce, *Chance, Love and Logic*, The Fixation of Belief, V, 20–22.

⁶⁰⁷ Peirce, *Chance, Love and Logic*, The Fixation of Belief, V, 20–22.

this method in that it adopts propositions ‘agreeable to reason,’ in other words, those things people find jointly inclined to believe. Yet such philosophy, argues Peirce, is the least developed form of the method he has in mind. In the final analysis it does not look much different from the method of authority.⁶⁰⁸

The imperfections of the *a priori* method, Peirce says, make it necessary that “a method should be found by which our beliefs may be caused by nothing human, but by some external permanency—by something upon which our mind has no effect.” The method must be applicable to all people and which when followed yields for all the same result. This is *the method of science*. The test of the method lies in the application of it. Both good reasoning and bad are possible with it.⁶⁰⁹

We may compare these four ways in a Table.

| Method | Character of the Method |
|------------------|---|
| <i>Tenacity</i> | Individualistic wish-fulfillment; doubt squelched so far as possible. |
| <i>Authority</i> | Communal and institutionalized (religion), but culturally relativistic. Establishes correct belief and squelches dissent. |
| <i>A priori</i> | Seeks individual assent to communal reasoned conclusions. |
| <i>Science</i> | Subordinates individuals and communities to external, objective truths that govern method. |

⁶⁰⁸ Peirce, *Chance, Love and Logic*, The Fixation of Belief, V, 23–25. The quote is from p. 23.

⁶⁰⁹ Peirce, *Chance, Love and Logic*, The Fixation of Belief, V, 25–28. The quote is from p. 25. He considers and dismisses mysticism as a possibility, considering a form of the method of tenacity.

The pragmatist pursues the method of science. It is, Peirce says, “in *experimental phenomena*, that rational meaning is said to exist.” These refer to future events happening to everyone who meets certain conditions, thus: “The rational meaning of every proposition lies in the future.” And the meaning of such propositions?

It is, according to the pragmaticist, that form in which the proposition becomes applicable to human conduct, not in these or those special circumstances, nor when one entertains this or that special design, but that form which is most directly applicable to self-control under every situation, and to every purpose.⁶¹⁰

So all matters tie together, their center in the scientific method that utilizes a kind of thinking wherein both belief and doubt play a role, but roles constrained by progressively refined self-preparation so as to come ever closer to truth (as absolute knowledge which is a fixed belief of truth absent any self-reproach). In this manner epistemology is firmly fixed to ethics. To think using the scientific method is to live pragmatically.

But what of metaphysics? Peirce contends that one advantage of Pragmatism is that it illuminates the folly of ontological metaphysics:

It will serve to show that almost every proposition of ontological metaphysics is either meaningless gibberish, one word being defined by other words, and they by still others, without any real conception ever being reached, or else is downright absurd; so that all such rubbish being swept away, what will remain of philosophy will be a se-

⁶¹⁰ Peirce, “What Pragmatism Is,” 173–74. Quotes from 173 (1st two) and 174 (last one).

ries of problems capable of investigation by the observational methods of the true sciences. . . .⁶¹¹

Peirce places his hope and confidence in a philosophy practical for life because it utilizes fully and intelligently human capabilities as given. By pursuing the scientific method, characterized by a commitment to experimental verification of theories, those given cognitive capacities can develop to their fullest degree.

William James

In many respects the Pragmatism of Peirce is substantially like the much better known Pragmatism of William James (1842–1910). The distance that grows between these friends and colleagues comes principally from James' view that Pragmatism not only presents a general philosophical method but also *a specific test of truth*. Commonly called the American 'father' of philosophy and psychology, and the most towering American intellect of the late 19th–early 20th century, more than any other figure, James puts Pragmatism on the map.

James says quite bluntly, "Pragmatism is willing to take anything, to follow either logic or the senses and to count the humblest and most personal experiences."⁶¹²

Pragmatism . . . asks its usual question, "Grant an idea or belief to be true," it says, "what concrete difference will it make in any one's actual life? How will the truth be realized? What experiences will be different from those which would obtain if the belief were false? What, in short, is the truth's cash-value in experiential terms?"

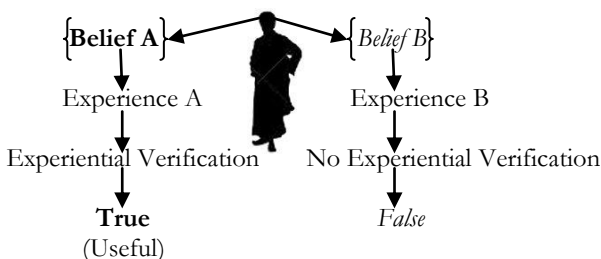
⁶¹¹ Peirce, "What Pragmatism Is," 171.

⁶¹² James, *Pragmatism*, 80.

The moment pragmatism asks this question, it sees the answer: *True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we can not.* That is the practical difference it makes to us to have true ideas; that, therefore, is the meaning of truth, for it is all that truth is known as.

This thesis is what I have to defend. The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity *is* in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its ver-*ification*. Its validity is the process of its vali-*dation*.⁶¹³

Pragmatism as a test of truth looks like this:



“True is the name for whatever idea starts the verification process, useful is the name for its completed function in experience.”⁶¹⁴ In other words, truth is not a matter of arbitrary opinions or willy-nilly beliefs.

James differentiates among three classes of things:

1. *facts*, which are easy to verify;
2. *matters we don't directly experience that we have no reason to disbelieve*—trustworthy testimonies by others, definitions, abstractions (ideas, prin-

⁶¹³ James, *Pragmatism*, 200–01.

⁶¹⁴ James, *Pragmatism*, 204.

ciples) and relations between things we quickly, intuitively grasp; and

3. *things we already know to be true.*⁶¹⁵

Truth ‘agrees’ with these three kinds of realities. The key though is what is meant by ‘agrees,’ for James argues this is where pragmatism departs from other approaches to truth. James explains the pragmatist position: “To ‘agree’ in the widest sense with a reality *can only mean to be guided either straight up to it or into its surroundings, or to be put into such working touch with it that as to handle either it or something connected with it better than if we disagreed.*”⁶¹⁶

James points out that it is practical for us to be *consistent* in how we think and talk because we are constantly sharing ideas with one another. We all know that most of our ideas are not subject to direct verification by our sense experience (e.g., historical matters). Thus to ‘agree’ is typically a matter of *leading* to something useful. For the pragmatist, then, ‘agreement’ is always a practical matter. Something that *works* “must derange common sense and previous belief as little as possible, and it must lead to some sensible terminus or other than can be verified exactly.”⁶¹⁷

Truth, argues James, is like health: something *made*. What is ‘true’ is expedient in our thinking, just as what is ‘right’ is expedient in our acting. But expediency here takes the long and broad view, seeking a goodness-of-

⁶¹⁵ James, *Pragmatism*, 205–11.

⁶¹⁶ James, *Pragmatism*, 212–13. (Italics are in original.)

⁶¹⁷ James, *Pragmatism*, 213–16. The quote is from p. 216.

fit with experience while staying open to the possibility that the future might lead to something different.⁶¹⁸

While Peirce originates Pragmatism in 1878, at first it intends merely a method for making ideas clear. It provides a theory of clearness rather than a theory of truth. As such it does not make much of a splash. When William James establishes it as a theory of truth it gains widespread attention. But James' approach leaves many disturbed as it does not seem quite conventional enough for science. It is thus left to Dewey to make it more palatable.⁶¹⁹

John Dewey

John Dewey (1859–1952), best known today within philosophy of education circles, continues Pragmatism. He, too, steers an independent course. Here we can do little more than to note one or two points he makes.

Dewey finds fault with both rationalism and empiricism, but with respect to realism and idealism he says of his Pragmatism that “the presuppositions and tendencies of pragmatism are strictly realistic; not idealistic in any sense in which idealism connotes or is connoted by a theory of knowledge.” As he bluntly puts it, “Knowledge, even *getting* knowledge, must rest on facts, or things.”⁶²⁰

Knowledge follows knowing; the former is created by the latter.⁶²¹ This places knowledge squarely within a

⁶¹⁸ James, *Pragmatism*, 216–23.

⁶¹⁹ Geyer, “Pragmatic Theory of Truth.”

⁶²⁰ Dewey, “Discussion.” Quotes are from p. 324 and p. 325 respectively.

⁶²¹ Shook, *Dewey's Empirical Theory*, 7, writes, “Throughout Dewey's entire philosophical career he held that objects of knowledge are created by the process of knowing.”

process—one Dewey envisions as *adaptive*. Dewey's epistemology brings together evolutionary theory and modern psychology with philosophy in a position he calls *instrumentalism*.⁶²² He argues that evolution teaches us that every part of the living organism "has to be treated as an instrument of adjustment or adaptation to a particular environing situation."

This holds true for thinking, too. "Thinking follows, we will say, striving, and doing follows thinking. Each in the fulfilment of its own function inevitably calls out its successor."⁶²³ The function of thinking as an adaptive response to environmental conditions means that a process of *inquiry*—knowledge-seeking—begins with a problematic situation the Knower finds her- or himself in. This prompts *reflective thinking*.

All reflective inquiry starts from a problematic situation, and no such situation can be settled in its own terms. It evolves into a resolved situation only by means of introduction of material not found in the situation itself. Imaginative survey, comparison with things already known, is the first step. This does not eventuate in complete knowledge, however, until some overt experimental act takes place by means of which an existential incorporation and organization is brought about.⁶²⁴

Were it not for some problem no change in previous thinking would be needed and knowledge would not need to grow. Knowledge, by its nature, is "*an instrument or organ of successive action*."⁶²⁵ Before reflective

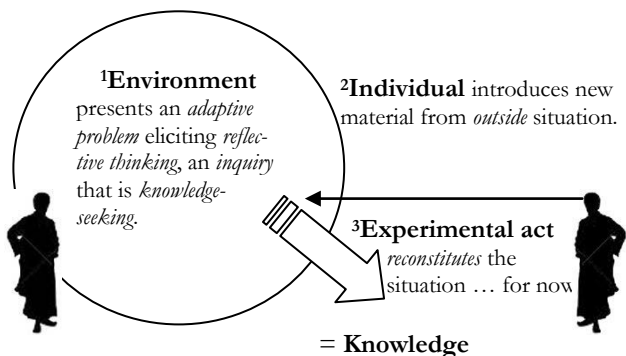
⁶²² For an overview, see Shook, *Dewey's Empirical Theory*.

⁶²³ Dewey, *Studies in Logical Theory*, I: Thought and Its Subject Matter, 15–16. Quotes are from p. 15 and p. 16 respectively.

⁶²⁴ Dewey, *Quest for Certainty*, 181.

⁶²⁵ Dewey, "Bearings of Pragmatism," 2.

thinking arises a problem must rise, pose a question to be answered, and elicit the inquiry pursued by reflective thinking. Thus, Dewey writes, “The two limits of every unit of thinking are a perplexed, troubled, or confused situation at the beginning and a cleared-up, unified, resolved situation at the close.”⁶²⁶ What knowledge does is *reconstitute* things with an eye to action and future consequences. It looks like this:



The knowledge that eventuates is not permanent. As an instrument of successive action the process of knowing continues. It is always future-oriented.⁶²⁷ As to the difference between “knowledge” and “belief,” Dewey is indifferent since neither provide certainty.

Of the three classical pragmatists, Dewey proves to be the most influential. His Pragmatism has an especially profound effect on American education, though it

⁶²⁶ Dewey, *How We Think*, 106.

⁶²⁷ Dewey, “Philosophy and Democracy,” 42, remarks, “Knowledge is partial and incomplete, any and all knowledge, till we have placed it in the context of a future which cannot be known, but only speculated about and resolved upon.”

also influences other social processes (e.g., law and courts). Of all the theories of knowledge we shall examine, Pragmatism is the most distinctively American.

Chapter 15

Linguistic (Analytic) Philosophy

Pragmatism's efforts to link itself to a scientific orientation in philosophy did not meet with approval from the prominent English philosopher Bertrand Russell. He says that James' pragmatism starts by asking, What are the characteristics in beliefs that lead folk to judge some as true but others as false? Pragmatists, Russell complains, assume the answer to this question will provide the meaning of both truth and falsehood. But they don't think like empirical scientists; they stay in the subjective realm proper to psychologists. This leads, in Russell's estimation, to problems. Their idea of what 'works' is not what a scientist means. Science desires working hypotheses where, in theory, all its verifiable consequences prove true. Pragmatists claim that science offers one way of being pragmatic, but from the standpoint of science the pragmatic way of working is inadequate.⁶²⁸ This critique is quite in keeping with Pragmatism's rival in the 20th century English-speaking world: Linguistic (Analytic) Philosophy.

What we are calling "Linguistic (Analytic) Philosophy" embraces a number of strands that have in common a conviction that philosophy should first and foremost be concerned with an *analysis of language* in the service of a scientific pursuit of knowledge. This central

⁶²⁸ Russell, "Pragmatism," 93–96.

idea changes shape over time and the successive moments when one or another view prevails for a number of people eventually gives rise to a variety of names.

Early on a group of figures come to be associated with what has been called “Logical Empiricism,” or as some prefer “Logical Positivism.”⁶²⁹ (Because a more tightly defined set of thinkers has been identified with Logical Positivism, many of the remarks here are perhaps best associated with that label.)

The Analytic tradition has roots in both Continental Europe and the English-speaking world. The older roots are in the Positivism of the 19th century, and even further back the thinking of the British Empiricists, but the more immediate roots lie in the work of Bertrand Russell and his protégé Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Auguste Comte & Positivism

The term ‘Positivism’ is most associated with French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857). In the early 19th century philosophical metaphysics was still plagued by an ignorance of—at least ignoring of—modern science. Comte’s argument is that modern philosophy cannot pretend science has not fundamentally altered how philosophers must think. He sketches the history of human thinking into three stages:

1. Theological;
2. Metaphysical; and
3. Positive.

The earliest and most primitive is the *theological*, where thinking is under the power of superstition. The

⁶²⁹ The latter label has been considered a narrower one and encompassing fewer figures than “Logical Empiricism.”

second stage, *metaphysics*, is an improvement because now people are seriously grappling with reality and applying reason. But this stage is plagued by a lack of facts to warrant the answers proposed. However, with the new age of science comes a *positive* stage wherein thinking appeals to facts and abandons dogmatism.

About this final stage Comte writes:

In the final, the positive state, the mind has given over the vain search after Absolute notions, the origin and destination of the universe, and the causes of phenomena, and applies itself to the study of their laws,—that is, their invariable relations of succession and resemblance. Reasoning and observation, duly combined, are the means of this knowledge. What is now understood when we speak of an explanation of facts is simply the establishment of a connection between single phenomena and some general facts, the number of which continually diminishes with the progress of science.⁶³⁰

The views of Comte initially enjoy a warmer reception in the United Kingdom than among his French peers (though this will change later on). Most notably, they find approval by the father of Utilitarianism, John Stuart Mill, Britain's preeminent philosopher of the 19th century. Mill's 1866 volume *Auguste Comte and Positivism* characterizes Comte's voluminous *Cours de Positive Philosophie* as "an essentially sound view of philosophy, with

⁶³⁰ Comte, *Positive Philosophy (Cours de Positive Philosophie)*, I, 2. The rendering used here by Harriet Martineau is styled as "freely translated" and is a condensation of Comte's French work. Her three volume translation was enormously successful in introducing his work to English readers and was warmly applauded by Comte himself.

a few capital errors. . . .”⁶³¹ The warm reception by Mill, as well as his incorporation of certain of Comte’s notions, helps extend the reach of Positivism.

Comte’s influence on the early 20th century Continental thinkers of Logical Positivism rests mostly in the rejection of metaphysics (his displaced second stage), and in looking toward the natural sciences as partner and guide to the labors of philosophy. Still, the later label “Logical Positivism” has always been an uneasy fit because it too easily suggests a closer relationship to Comte’s overall position than actually ever exists.

On the other hand, the somewhat broader label of “Logical Empiricism,” rather than highlight the connection to Comte’s Positivism, uses the term “Empiricism” to call attention to the general commitment to philosophical empiricism without all that is entailed in Positivism. The roots of linguistic philosophy, as noted earlier, extend back to the British Empiricists. The extent to which linguistic philosophers connect to figures like Hume, though, is varied.⁶³²

In both labels the term “Logical” points to other precursors. It is to these figures—Russell and Wittgenstein—we must now turn.

⁶³¹ Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, 5.

⁶³² Blumberg and Feigl, “Logical Positivism,” 282, note that the union of empiricism with “a sound theory of logic” differentiates the Vienna Circle logical positivists from the older empirical tradition of Hume, Mill, Comte and Ernst Mach which “fell into the error of carrying their empiricism too far.” On the other hand, Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 9, in the opening lines of his Preface declares, “The views which are put forward in this treatise derive from the doctrines of Bertrand Russell and Wittgenstein, which are themselves the logical outcome of the empiricism of Berkeley and David Hume.”

Bertrand Russell & Logical Atomism

While Comte's Positivism provides a more distal source for 20th century Logical Positivism, its proximate inspiration lies strongly in Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), an Englishman nobleman⁶³³ and a prominent mathematician and logician. In the first decade of the 20th century he already is developing an *analytical* approach to language in the service of epistemology.

On Denoting

In 1905, during the period when Russell is working out his ideas about logic, he publishes “On Denoting,” concerning language’s way of indicating things (literally, as in names and symbols (as distinct from *connotations*)). He observes the matter of denoting is one of *form* and though the form is the same, the results when interpreted can be many (definite, ambiguous, or contentless). He points out, “The subject of denoting is of very great importance, not only in logic and mathematics, but also in theory of knowledge.” That is because, he explains, “The distinction between *acquaintance* and *knowledge about* is the distinction between the things we have presentations of, and the things we only reach by means of denoting phrases.”⁶³⁴

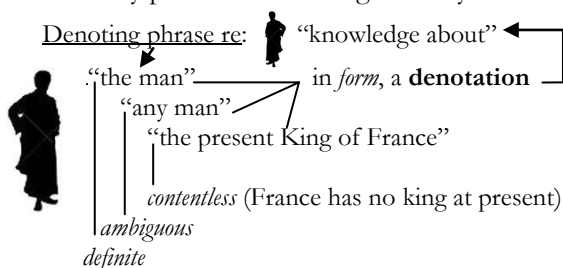
Because the same denotation might be interpreted in different ways and because denoting matters to knowing, some means of accurately analyzing denoting forms matters. To this end Russell proposes a basic

⁶³³ Bertrand Arthur William Russell, 3rd Earl Russell of Kingston Russell in the County of Dorset, England, and also Viscount Amberley of Amberley in the County of Gloucester and of Ardsalla in the County of Meath.

⁶³⁴ Russell, “On Denoting,” 479.

principle: “that denoting phrases never have any meaning in themselves, but that every proposition in whose verbal expression they occur has a meaning.” Russell claims, “The difficulties concerning denoting are, I believe, the result of a wrong analysis of propositions whose verbal expressions contain denoting phrases.”⁶³⁵

We may picture his thinking this way:



Denotation is meaningless apart from a proposition in its verbal context (e.g., “There is *the man* I wish you to meet.”) An *analysis of propositions* is required to discern meaning.

We need not here go into the details of how Russell develops his logic. What matters to us is that he centers epistemology in the logical analysis of language. As he points out near the end of his essay:

One interesting result of the theory of denoting is this: when there is anything with which we do not have immediate acquaintance, but only definition by denoting phrases, then the propositions in which this thing is introduced by means of a denoting phrase do not really contain this thing as a constituent, but contain instead the constituents expressed by the several words of the denoting phrase. Thus in every proposition that we can appre-

⁶³⁵ Russell, “On Denoting,” 480.

hend (*i.e.* not only in those whose truth or falsehood we can judge of, but in all that we can think about), all the constituents are really entities with which we have immediate acquaintance.⁶³⁶

Russell's point is that in the vast number of instances in which we do not have direct, immediate "acquaintance" (*i.e.*, through presentation to our senses or reason), our knowledge is only "knowledge about," and that comes through denoting phrases embedded in propositions. To derive meaning requires logical analysis of any proposition.

Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description

In a 1911 paper for the Aristotelian Society, Russell focuses on the matters of "acquaintance" and "description." He means by *acquaintance* the kind of cognitive relation to an object that is a direct awareness of it. He specifies further that this cognitive relation is not a judging of the object but merely the *presentation* of the object to the person. His reason for preferring the word acquaintance to presentation is to highlight that there exists a *relationship* between a Subject and an Object—and that both matter.⁶³⁷

Through sense-data comes an awareness of *particular* objects. But there is also awareness of *universals*, a process of conceiving that yields conceptions. Thus, he reasons, there can be knowledge by acquaintance of both particulars and universals. However, though we have acquaintance with objects through sense-data,

⁶³⁶ Russell, "On Denoting," 492.

⁶³⁷ Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance," 108–09. The paper is titled

actual physical objects, and other Subjects' minds, are known not by acquaintance, but by *description*.⁶³⁸

This kind of knowledge is where language enters. Some phrases are *definite* descriptions ('the ____'), while others are *ambiguous* ('a ____'). "What I wish to discuss," Russell says, "is the nature of our knowledge concerning objects in cases where we know that there is an object answering to a definite description, though we are not *acquainted* with any such object."⁶³⁹

We make statements about objects known only by description. When we form *propositions* about an object known by description we intend some truth about the object, though in actuality we are *describing the proposition* we want to affirm about the object. The good news is that so long as the description is correct it can vary and the proposition remains true. As Russell puts it, "This proposition, which is described and is known to be true, is what interests us; but we are not acquainted with the proposition itself, and we do not know *it*, though we know it to be true."⁶⁴⁰

The relationship between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description is that the latter depends on the former. Russell declares that the fundamental principle in the analysis of propositions having descriptions is this: "*Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted.*"⁶⁴¹

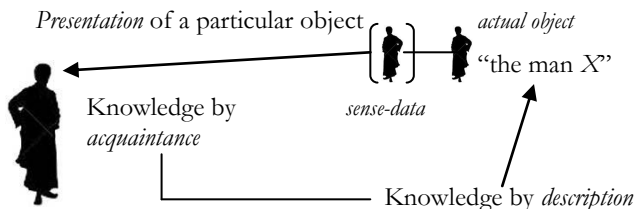
⁶³⁸ Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance," 109–11.

⁶³⁹ Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance," 112–13; quote from 113.

⁶⁴⁰ Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance," 116.

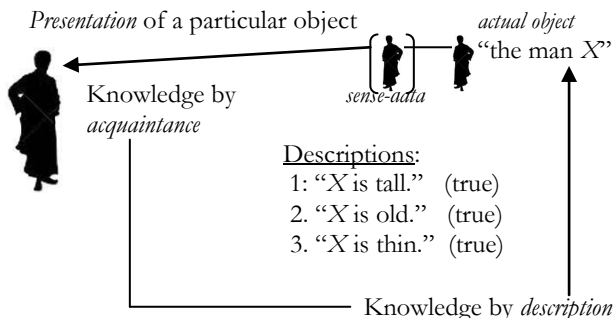
⁶⁴¹ Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance," 117.

Let's picture this:



The actual object—in this case a specific man—answers to a definite description, even though the knower is not “acquainted,” as for example occurs with historical figures, or a person who is presently absent. *If* a definite description presented fits the person in mind and no else in the same fashion *then* we have knowledge by description.

Now let's carry our picture a bit further:

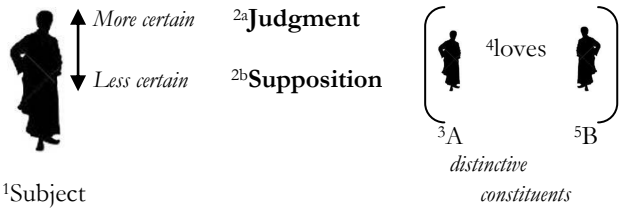


Whether the descriptions of *X* are from three different people, or from the same person at different times, all are true so long as they fit the actual object in mind and no one else in the same fashion. Although *X* is not present, so that there is no knowledge by acquaintance (i.e., no direct awareness of sense-data of

X), the knowledge by description relies on constituents (e.g., particular height, age, profile) that we are acquainted with in respect to X. With any historical figure our direct acquaintance is likely with the testimony of some witness who had actual acquaintance with the person. The point is: knowledge by description depends upon particulars known by acquaintance.

When we make *judgments* about an object we are involved in a complex of relationships. Russell gives the example of “A loves B.” In addition to the Subject making the judgment, there is A, B, and ‘love.’ All four are constituents of the complex which forms the judgment. However, since the Subject and the act of judging are common to *all* judgments, only three constituents are *distinctive constituents* (A, B, love). Similarly, one might *suppose* rather than judge. If judgment expresses knowledge, supposing merely expresses belief, that is, a lack of enough knowledge to make a judgment. Once again there must be acquaintance with distinctive constituents. “This is merely to say,” Russell remarks, “that we cannot make a judgment or a supposition without knowing what it is that we are making our judgment or supposition about.”⁶⁴² It looks like this:

Constituents of a Complex:



⁶⁴² Russell, “Knowledge by Acquaintance,” 117–18; quote from 118.
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With such thoughts in mind, Russell offers an analysis of the statement, “The man whose name was Julius Caesar was assassinated.” One part—“the man whose name was Julius Caesar”—is a *definite description*. The other part—“was assassinated”—is a *judgment*. There is one constituent with which we are actually acquainted: the name “Julius Caesar,” which is a noise or visual shape presented as sense-data. Aside from the verb tense (“was”), all other constituents are concepts, with which we are also acquainted.⁶⁴³

After embarking on some consideration of denotation,⁶⁴⁴ Russell then sums up the whole discussion, which it may be helpful to reproduce in full:

We began by distinguishing two sorts of knowledge of objects, namely, knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. Of these it is only the former that brings the object itself before the mind. We have acquaintance with sense-data, with many universals, and possibly with ourselves, but not with physical objects or other minds. We have descriptive knowledge of an object when we know that it is the object having some property or properties with which we are acquainted; that is to say, when we know that the property or properties in question belong to one object and no more, we are said to have knowledge of that one object by description, whether or not we are acquainted with the object. Our knowledge of physical objects and of other minds is only knowledge by description, the descriptions involved being usually such as involve sense-data. All propositions intelligible to us, whether or not they primarily concern things only known to us by description, are composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted, for

⁶⁴³ Russell, “Knowledge by Acquaintance,” 118–20.

⁶⁴⁴ Russell, “Knowledge by Acquaintance,” 121–27.

a constituent with which we are not acquainted is unintelligible to us. A judgment, we found, is not composed of mental constituents called “ideas,” but consists of an occurrence whose constituents are a mind and certain objects, particulars or universals. (One at least must be a universal.) When a judgment is rightly analysed, the objects which are constituents of it must all be objects with which the mind which is a constituent of it is acquainted. This conclusion forces us to analyse descriptive phrases occurring in propositions, and to say that the objects denoted by such phrases are not constituents of judgments in which such phrases occur (unless these objects are explicitly mentioned). . . . Such judgments, therefore, can only be analyzed by breaking up the descriptive phrases, introducing a variable, and making propositional functions the ultimate subjects.⁶⁴⁵

Logical Atomism

Over a number of years Russell elaborates and clarifies what the logical analysis he envisions looks like and how it fits into a larger philosophical position. Also in 1911 he announces the label *logical atomism* to describe that position:

The philosophy that seems to me true could be called “analytical realism.” It is realist, since it maintains that there are non-mental existences and that cognitive relations are external relations, which establish a direct link between the subject and an object that can be non-mental. It is analytical, since it maintains that the existence of the complex depends on the existence of the simple, and not *vice versa*, and that the constituent of a complex is absolutely identical, as constituent, to what it

⁶⁴⁵ Russell, “Knowledge by Acquaintance,” 127–28.

is in itself when one does not consider its relations. This philosophy is therefore an atomic philosophy.⁶⁴⁶

In Russell's mind it is evident philosophy needs reform. He comments in his 1912 volume, *The Problems of Philosophy*, "It would seem that knowledge concerning the universe as a whole is not to be obtained by metaphysics, and that the proposed proofs that, in virtue of the laws of logic, such and such things must exist and such and such others cannot, are not capable of surviving a critical scrutiny."⁶⁴⁷ After taking Kant and Hegel to task, Russell comes to the point:

Philosophical knowledge, if what has been said above is true, does not differ essentially from scientific knowledge; there is no special source of wisdom which is open to philosophy but not to science, and the results obtained by philosophy are not radically different from those obtained from science. The essential characteristic of philosophy, which makes it a study distinct from science, is *criticism*. It examines critically the principles employed in science and in daily life; it searches out any inconsistencies there may be in these principles, and it

⁶⁴⁶ Russell, "Le Réalisme analytique," 282: *La philosophie qui me paraît la vraie pourrait s'appeler «réalismeanalytique». Elle est réaliste, puisqu'elle soutient qu'il y a des existences non-mentales et que les relations cognitives sont des relations externes, qui établissent un lien direct entre le sujet et un objet qui peut être non-mental. Elle est analytique, puisqu'elle soutient que l'existence du complexe dépend de l'existence du simple, et non pas vice versa, et que le constituant d'un complexe est absolument identique, comme constituant, à ce qu'il est en lui-même quand on ne considère pas ses relations. Cette philosophie est donc une philosophie atomique.* For the original paper and an English translation, see Russell, *Logical Papers*, Appendix V (French) and paper 14, "Analytical Realism."

⁶⁴⁷ Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, Limits of Knowledge, 220–21.

only accepts them when, as the result of a critical inquiry, no reason for rejecting them has appeared.⁶⁴⁸

Philosophy is “a *criticism* of knowledge,” he says, but not the kind of criticism mounted by a Skeptic, who stays outside of knowledge and only offers destructive criticism. Instead, he continues, the kind of skepticism required is like that of Descartes, intended to a positive end. The modest goal of philosophical criticism is to reduce the risk of error.⁶⁴⁹

From his perspective, surveying the history of philosophy, it seems clear it is lacking. He complains at the start of a series of lectures in his 1914 work *Our Knowledge of the External World*, that, “Philosophy, from the earliest times, has made greater claims, and achieved fewer results, than any other branch of learning.” However, there is hope:

The problems and the method of philosophy have, I believe, been misconceived by all schools, many of its traditional problems being insoluble with our means of knowledge, while other more neglected but not less important problems can, by a more patient and more adequate method, be solved with all the precision and certainty to which the most advanced sciences have attained.⁶⁵⁰

Russell expresses his confidence that logical atomism can do in philosophy what is being done in mathematics: construct something both certain and true by

⁶⁴⁸ Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, Limits of Knowledge, 233.

⁶⁴⁹ Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, Limits of Knowledge, 234–36. The quoted phrase is from p. 234.

⁶⁵⁰ Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Lecture I: Current Tendencies, 3.

articulating a better *logic* than in the past.⁶⁵¹ That logic's first business is "a classification of the logical forms of facts." The role played by *facts* is crucial so we must grasp what he means. "When I speak of a 'fact'," Russell explains, "I do not mean one of the simple things in the world; I mean that a certain thing has a certain quality, or that certain things have a certain relation."⁶⁵²

A simple name, for example, is not a fact; but something attached to that name, such as 'Napoleon was ambitious,' is a fact—and illustrates an important characteristic of facts: they possess complexity, having two or more constituents. When a fact consists of a relation between constituents it has both the constituent things and the constituent relation (as we saw in our last illustration). In sum, the *constituents of facts* are things, qualities, and relations.⁶⁵³

Facts, Russell says, are objective; the *assertions* made about them involves thinking and may prove to be either positive or negative (a "denial"), true or false. Where truth is the issue an assertion is a *proposition*. When propositions assert a fact, Russell terms them *atomic propositions*. Likewise, the facts that give rise to them are called *atomic facts*. These are all known empirically by sense-perception. That means all atomic propo-

⁶⁵¹ Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Logic as the Essence of Philosophy, 24, remarks, "[E]very philosophical problem, when it is subjected to the necessary analysis and purification, is found either to be not really philosophical at all, or else to be, in the sense in which we are using the word, logical." He is referring to what he calls "logistic" or "mathematical logic" (p. 49)

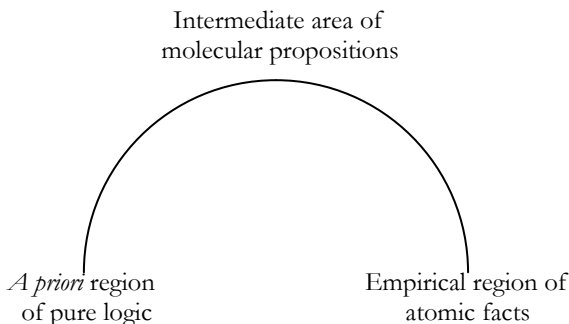
⁶⁵² Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Logic as the Essence of Philosophy, 50–51. Quoted material is from p. 50 and p. 51.

⁶⁵³ Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Logic as the Essence of Philosophy, 51–52.

sitions, whether positively asserted or denied, can only be known empirically. Atomic facts are at one end of a continuum where pure logic—the *a priori*—sits at the opposite extreme.⁶⁵⁴

What lies between the empirical and purely logical extremes now draws Russell's attention. In this region exist *molecular propositions*. Just as in the physical world atoms become part of larger molecules, so too in language. Molecular propositions are built up through words like conjunctions ("and," "or") and conditionals ("if," "unless"). Russell declares, "Such propositions are important in logic because all inference depends upon them."⁶⁵⁵

We have enough now for another picture:



Besides atomic and molecular propositions there are also *general propositions*, which are either positive ("all ____") or negative ("some ____"). When all the atomic

⁶⁵⁴ Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Logic as the Essence of Philosophy, 52–54. Russell, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism, I," 504, notes, "A proposition is just a symbol."

⁶⁵⁵ Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Logic as the Essence of Philosophy, 54–55. The quote is from p. 54.

facts in a given collection of facts are known, then *positive general knowledge* has been achieved. "But all empirical evidence is of particular truths," Russell notes. "Hence, if there is any knowledge of general truths at all, there must be some knowledge of general truths which is independent of empirical evidence, i.e. does not depend upon the data of sense."⁶⁵⁶

Where, then, does such general knowledge derive? "Such general knowledge is to be found in logic," Russell asserts.⁶⁵⁷ This means logic is both essential to philosophy and central to it.

He soon adds:

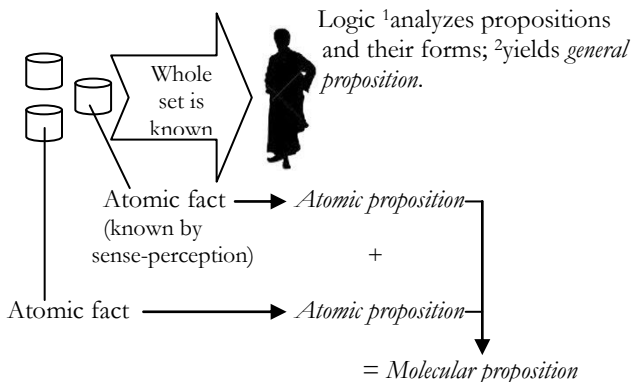
Logic, we may say, consists of two parts. The first part investigates what propositions are and what forms they may have; this part enumerates the different kinds of atomic propositions, of molecular propositions, of general propositions, and so on. The second part consists of certain supremely general propositions, which assert the truth of all propositions of certain forms. This second part merges into pure mathematics, whose propositions all turn out, on analysis, to be such general formal truths.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁶ Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Logic as the Essence of Philosophy, 55–56. The quote is from p. 56.

⁶⁵⁷ Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Logic as the Essence of Philosophy, 56.

⁶⁵⁸ Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Logic as the Essence of Philosophy, 57. Earlier (p. 52) Russell had said, "In every proposition and in every inference there is, besides the particular subject-matter concerned, a certain *form*, a way in which the constituents of the proposition or inference are put together."

It looks like this:



Although the first part—investigating what propositions are and their forms—is more difficult, it is also more important. Russell declares that, “it is the recent progress in this first part, more than anything else, that has rendered a truly scientific discussion of many philosophical problems possible.”⁶⁵⁹

In his 1918 paper, “The Philosophy of Logical Atomism,” Russell argues, “The process of sound philosophizing, to my mind, consists mainly in passing from those obvious, vague, ambiguous things, that we feel quite sure of, to something precise, clear, definite, which by reflection and analysis we find is involved in the vague thing that we started from, and is, so to speak, the real truth of which that vague thing is a sort of shadow.”⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁹ Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Logic as the Essence of Philosophy, 58.

⁶⁶⁰ Russell, “The Philosophy of Logical Atomism, I,” I: Facts and Propositions, 497–98.

Obviously, that requires careful analysis of language at every level, though the sentence level is basic. Earlier he had said, "In order to understand a sentence, it is necessary to have knowledge both of the constituents and of the particular instance of the form."⁶⁶¹ Of course, as he reminds now, the possibility of error persists.⁶⁶²

Language is naturally ambiguous because even a simple name means different things to different people based on the way they know what the name names. This ambiguity leads to complexity. But, then, Russell points out, the world is complex, too. The complexity of language propositions mirrors that reality.⁶⁶³

But what if language could be sculpted to produce less ambiguity? To render, instead, *clarity*? Russell describes what a "logically perfect language" would look like:

In a logically perfect language the words in a proposition would correspond one by one with the components of the corresponding fact, with the exception of such words as "or," "not," "if," "then," which have a different function. In a logically perfect language, there will be one word and no more for every simple object, and everything that is not simple will be expressed by a combination of words, a combination derived, of course, from the words for the simple things that enter in, one word for each simple component. A language of that sort

⁶⁶¹ Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Logic as the Essence of Philosophy, 53.

⁶⁶² Russell, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism, I," I, 498–500.

⁶⁶³ Russell, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism, I" II: Particulars, Predicates, and Relations, 517–20.

will be completely analytic, and it will show at a glance the logical structure of the facts asserted or denied.⁶⁶⁴

Russell asserts that the language set out by himself and Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) in their *Principia Mathematica* is of exactly this nature (save that it is only syntax, with no vocabulary!). But he is no fabulist. Russell understands that, “Actual languages are not logically perfect in this sense, and they cannot possibly be, if they are to serve the purposes of daily life.”⁶⁶⁵

Ludwig Wittgenstein & the Tractatus

Russell’s vision sparks a doctoral student under his guidance, and the result is the single document most influential in presenting the view that subsequently inspires the Logical Positivists of the Vienna Circle. In 1921, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) publishes a short volume titled *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (*Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung*). It is quickly thereafter translated into English alongside the German original (1922).

In keeping with Russell’s hope that a few basic axioms might be elucidated by which to structure a logic useful for philosophy, Wittgenstein structures his volume around seven propositions:

1. The world is everything; that is the case (*Fall*).
2. What the case is, the fact, is the existence of facts (*Tatsachen*).

⁶⁶⁴ Russell, “The Philosophy of Logical Atomism, I,” 520.

⁶⁶⁵ Russell, “The Philosophy of Logical Atomism, I,” 520. Shortly above this comment Russell remarks on “the great advantages that we derive from the logical imperfections of language, from the fact that all our words are ambiguous.”

3. The logical picture of the facts is the thought (*Gedanke*).
4. The thought is the meaningful sentence (*Satz*).
5. The proposition (*Satz*) is a truth-function of the 'elementary proposition' (*Elementarsatz*). (The elementary proposition is a truth-function of itself.)
6. The general form of a truth-function (*Wahrheitsfunktion*) is $[p, \xi^-, N, (\xi^-)]$. This is the general form of a proposition.
7. Of what one cannot speak, one must be silent.⁶⁶⁶

These basic propositions are elaborated through numbered statements—a total of 526 such statements, including the original seven. Only the last of these basic statements stands alone. The work is beguilingly simple in structure, but the content is not at all as straightforward or consistent as it might superficially appear and the work has been subjected to much debate as to its meaning in various parts.⁶⁶⁷ Among its fiercest critics is Wittgenstein himself in his later years.

Wittgenstein advances the notion that, "We make pictures of facts (*Tatsachen*).” He then adds, "The picture is a model of reality.” Just as reality is constituted

⁶⁶⁶ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 30 (#s 1–2), 42 (#3), 60 (#4), 102 (#5), 152 (#6), and 188 (#7); the English translation is found on the page following in each instance. "Sentence" in #4 is in the sense of a "proposition," and the latter is my choice in #5. The 7th is the most famous: *Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen*.

⁶⁶⁷ McGinn, *Elucidating the Tractatus*, x, remarks of the *Tractatus* that it can fairly be said, "the work contains ideas that are philosophically untenable, that it is dogmatic, and that it presents ideas that are in fundamental tension with one another."

of particular things, our mental picture (see #3) is constituted of particular elements. These elements represent (*vertreten*) real particulars and put together the whole picture faithfully represents reality.⁶⁶⁸ This one-to-one *correspondence* between the picture and the real can be expressed logically in language.

He links thought to language as follows: “The sign by which we express the thought I name ‘the symbol set’ (*Satzzeichen*).”⁶⁶⁹ As we saw in Russell, this symbol set is the *proposition*. Wittgenstein goes on to say that the “symbol set” or “proposition” has as its elements words which are arranged into a definite, logical combination and thus constitute a “fact” (*Tatsache*). However, its factual nature is hidden by our ordinary ways of expression, whether oral or in writing, even though that nature can be made clear.⁶⁷⁰

The goal of philosophical analysis, of course, is to produce *clarity*. As it stands now in philosophy, in Wittgenstein’s estimation, “Most of the statements and questions which have been written about philosophical matters are not false, but nonsensical.”⁶⁷¹ He points to

⁶⁶⁸ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 2.1–14 [German, 38]. 2.1: *Wir machen uns Bilder der Tatsachen* (1st quote). 2.12: *Das Bild ist ein Modell der Wirklichkeit* (2nd quote). Cf. 4.01.

⁶⁶⁹ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 3.12 [German, 44]: *Das Zeichen, durch welches wir den Gedanken ausdrücken, nenne ich das Satzzeichen*. Ogden (p. 45) chooses “propositional sign” to render *Satzzeichen*, which accurately reflects the sense (as underscored by Wittgenstein’s use of *Satz* in the next sentence). I wanted to emphasize the symbolic character of this as an element of logic.

⁶⁷⁰ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 3.12–1431 [German, 44–46]. Cf. 4.002 (end).

⁶⁷¹ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.003 [German, 62]: *Die meisten Sätze und Fragen, welche über philosophische Dinge geschrieben worden sind, sind nicht falsch, sondern unsinnig*.

Russell as someone who has shown the way to pursue philosophy as a “critique of language” (*Sprachkritik*).⁶⁷² In such a critique, propositions are treated as a kind of “trial” or “experiment” (*probeweise*).⁶⁷³ “Reality is compared to the proposition,”⁶⁷⁴ Wittgenstein writes. This process shows the nature of philosophy, which is caught by three of Wittgenstein’s assertions:

“The purpose of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts.”

“Philosophy is not doctrine (*Lehre*) but activity.”

“The result of philosophy is not ‘philosophical propositions,’ but a making clear (*Klarwerden*) of propositions.”⁶⁷⁵

Wittgenstein actually sums up his work in his Preface: “One could put the whole meaning of the book into these words: what can be said at all, let it be clear; and what you can not say, be silent about it.”⁶⁷⁶ It is practical advice, if also a daunting challenge.

Although, like our other illustrations, the following picture only roughly and very partly expresses his position, Wittgenstein’s ideas look somewhat like this:

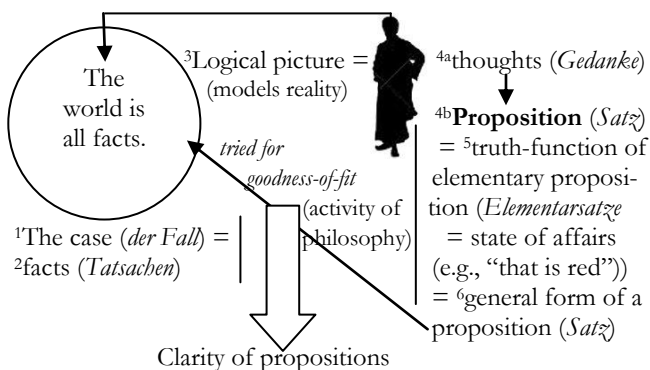
⁶⁷² Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.0031 [German, 62]..

⁶⁷³ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.031 [German, 68].

⁶⁷⁴ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.05 [German, 70]: *Die Wirklichkeit wird mit dem Satz verglichen.*

⁶⁷⁵ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.1121 [German, 76], 1st quote: *Der Zweck der Philosophie ist die logische Klärung der Gedanken* 2nd quote: *Die Philosophie ist keine Lehre, sondern eine Tätigkeit.* 3rd quote: *Das Resultat der Philosophie sind nicht “philosophie Sätze,” sondern das Klarwerden von Sätzen.*

⁶⁷⁶ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, Preface [German, 26]: *Man konnte den ganze Sinn des Buches etwa in die Worte fassen: Was sich überhaupt sagen lässt, lässt sich klar sagen; und wovon man nicht reden kann, darüber muss man schweigen.*



7"Of what one cannot speak, one must be silent."

Logical Positivism & the Vienna Circle: Moritz Schlick

Russell and Wittgenstein, exercising mutual influence on each other, develop ideas that draw considerable attention and excitement on the Continent among a small circle of thinkers. These figures become known collectively as logical positivists.

Logical Positivism provides a label indicating two important emphases among a number of philosophers in the first half of the 20th century. The 'Logical' part of the name refers to a commitment to the kind of analysis promoted by Russell and by Wittgenstein. The 'Positivism' of the name, like Comte's positivism (and unlike Russell's logical atomism), entirely disavows metaphysics in favor of facts like those pursued in the natural sciences.⁶⁷⁷ Logical Positivism also generally ignores ethics; its attention is squarely upon epistemology. The

⁶⁷⁷ See Schlick, "Positivism and Realism," I: Preliminary Questions.

name has been most often attached to a particular group of thinkers known as the *Vienna Circle*.

Friedrich Albert Moritz Schlick (1882–1936) in the mid-1920s founds the Vienna Circle, which includes among its members Rudolph Carnap (1891–1970) and the logician Kurt Friedrich Gödel (1906–1978). It is impossible here to adequately explore and explain the contributions of each of these figures, and notable others. For the purpose of our brief survey we shall examine some of the remarks of the founder, Moritz Schlick.

Knowledge is a matter of great interest to the Vienna Circle and Schlick is perhaps its most notable figure in articulating a theory of knowledge.⁶⁷⁸ He is conversant with the thoughts of both Wittgenstein and Russell, the latter figure being praised at one point as “the most important thinker” in the English-speaking world.⁶⁷⁹

Recognition/Re-cognition

In his *General Theory of Knowledge* (*Allgemeine Erkenntnislehre*), which first appears in 1918, Schlick writes in the Preface a statement of one of the volume’s themes: “[T]he knowledge of nature (*Naturerkennen*) is not a special kind of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*). Knowledge (*das Erkennen*) is everywhere; the most general principles are always the same, even in the humanities.”

⁶⁷⁸ Feigl and Blumberg in their introduction to Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, xxi, in summing up Schlick’s contributions conclude, “At all events, history will record Schlick as a trailblazer in the theory of knowledge and the philosophy of science.”

⁶⁷⁹ Schlick, “Bertrand Russell,” 81. Renderings of Schlick’s German are mine, though reference to at least one English translation are offered for various sources.

That means, as he will explain, that to a certain extent the theory of knowledge is separable from the particular and immediate problems of knowing pursued by different disciplines. The model sort of knowing—and here the influence of Positivism is felt—is scientific knowing, which is empirical in nature. In Schlick's estimation, philosophy and science cannot help but be partners because there is a close interrelationship of goals.⁶⁸⁰

But this interrelationship does not confuse one discipline for the other. It is not up to philosophy to decide what counts in science as knowledge. Instead, the task of philosophy with respect to scientific knowledge is "only to clarify and interpret."⁶⁸¹ In fact, philosophy follows the lead provided by science in the very definition of knowledge.

Before turning to that definition, Schlick considers the way knowledge is talked about in daily life. He identifies the following meanings attached to the act of cognition associated with the word "knowledge":

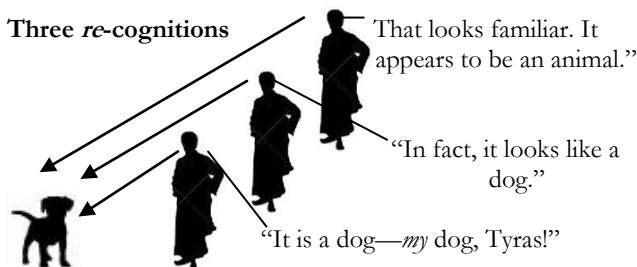
1. recognition (or "*re-cognized*" (*wiedererkennt*)) of an object as familiar (i.e., fitting characteristics attached to some general idea (e.g., animal));

⁶⁸⁰ Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, Preface to the 1st ed. [German ed., vi] (Blumberg translation, vi): *Dabei ist also das Naturerkennen nicht etwa eine besondere Art von Erkenntnis; das Erkennen ist überall ein es, die allgemeinsten Prinzipien sind stets dieselben, auch in den Geisteswissenschaften.* The separability of the theory of knowledge is mentioned on p. 2.

⁶⁸¹ Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, Part One: The Nature of Knowledge, §1: The Meaning of the Theory of Knowledge [German ed., 2] (Blumberg, 2–5; the quote is from p. 2): *sondern ihre Aufgabe ist nur, sie ihrerseits aufzuklären und zu deuten.*

2. another recognition, that the object upon closer inspection fits a particular idea (e.g., dog);
3. another *re*-cognition, that the object's identity exactly matches a very specific named object (e.g., Tyras—*my* dog).⁶⁸²

This process is from familiarity with a more general idea, to a fit with a more particular idea, to exact identity with a named object. It looks like this:



“Recognition,” or “*re*-cognition” is a *process* of cognition—a cognizing again and again. Schlick elsewhere recounts the new discovery of *the nature of cognition* within Logical Positivism. He writes, “The path to clarity about cognition is based on the fact that every cognition (*Erkenntnis*) is an expression, a representation.” He then adds that cognition “expresses the fact that is recognized in it.” This leads, he continues, to a particular realization: *knowledge depends upon its form*. By its form it represents whatever fact is known. “Everything else about it,” he adds, “is insignificant and incidental ma-

⁶⁸² Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, Part One, §2: Knowing in Everyday Life [German ed., 6–7] (Blumberg, 6–8).

terial, not unlike the ink with which we write down a sentence.”⁶⁸³

This then produces the following conclusion:

This simple insight has consequences of the utmost importance. They start with our dismissing the traditional problems of a ‘theory of knowledge’ (*Erkenntnistheorie*). In the place of investigations of the human ‘cognitive faculty’ (*Erkenntnisvermögens*), insofar as they can not be relegated to psychology, we have reflection on the nature of the expression, the representation—i.e., every possible ‘language’ in the general sense of the word. Questions about the ‘validity and limits of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*)’ are dropped. Everything that can be expressed is recognizable, and that is all that one can reasonably ask.⁶⁸⁴

Recovery & Reduction

In *General Theory of Knowledge*, building on the idea of recognition, Schlick remarks, “Everywhere the core of the cognitive process (*Erkenntnisprozesses*) turns out to be a recovery (*Wiederfinden*). . . . [K]nowing (*Erkennen*) in science, as in everyday life, means recovering one thing again in another.” Thus, the knower begins with two separate phenomena (*Erscheinungen*) and reduces them to one. As he puts it, “Cognition (*Erkenntnis*) is the reduction of one thing to another.”⁶⁸⁵

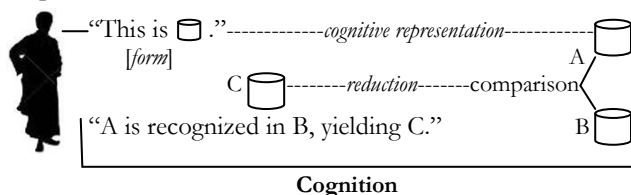
⁶⁸³ Schlick, “The Turning Point” [German, 6–7] (Rynin translation, 55–56). “Expression” translates *Ausdruck* and “representation” renders *Darstellung*, a term with a significant history in German philosophy and critical discourse. See Helfer, *Retreat of Representation*. 2nd quote: “Fact” translates *Tatbestand*.

⁶⁸⁴ Schlick, “The ‘Turning Point’” [German, 7] (Rynin translation, 55–56).

⁶⁸⁵ Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, Part One, §3: Knowing in Science [German, 10–11] (Blumberg, 11–12). 1st quote [German, 10]

In the pursuit of clarity Schlick distinguishes between “knowing” (*kennen* as “being acquainted with”) and “knowing” (*erkennen* as “understanding”). Knowing always starts with something one is already acquainted with and by means of some explanatory factor reduces two compared phenomena to one. It is not merely a matter of reducing something to that with which we are already acquainted. Reduction may yield something entirely new as when a hypothesis is formed to explain a set of facts.⁶⁸⁶

What we have seen to this point we might venture to picture as follows:



The goal in reducing what is unknown is to produce a smaller set of things yet unexplained, so that,

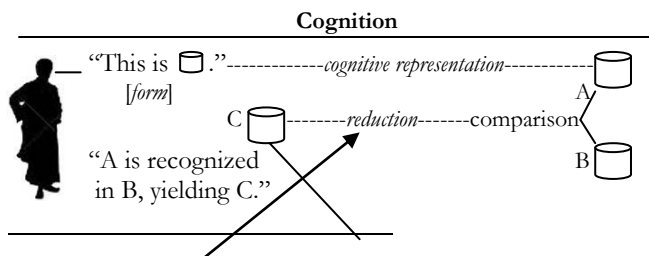
(Blumberg, 11): *überall enthüllt sich der Kern des Erkenntnisprozesses als ein Wiederfinden daß Erkennen in der Wissenschaft, wie schon im täglichen Leben, ein Wiederfinden des einen im andern bedeutet.* Blumberg translates *Wiederfinden* as “rediscovery.” Cf. [§4, start [German, 14] (Blumberg, 15): *Alles Erkennen ist ein Wiedererkennen oder Wiederfinden. Und alles Wiederfinden ist ein Gleichsetzen dessen, was erkannt wird, mit dem, als was es erkannt wird.* “All knowing (*Erkennen*) is a recognition (*Wiedererkennen*) or a recovery (*Wiederfinden*). And all recovery is an equating of *what* is known (*erkannt*) with *as what* it is known (*erkannt*).” 2nd quote [German, 12] (Blumberg, 13): *Erkenntnis ist Zurückführung des einen auf das andere.*

⁶⁸⁶ Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, §3 [German, 11] (Blumberg, 12). A bit later (German, 14; Blumberg, 15) he also distinguishes between “knowledge” (*Wissen*) and “knowledge” (*Erkenntnis*).

“So much is clear: in the manner described, the number of phenomena which are explained by one and the same principle becomes ever greater, and accordingly the number of principles necessary for the explanation of the totality of the phenomena becomes ever smaller.” The “ultimate goal of all knowledge” (*letzten Ziel alles Erkennens*) is to reduce the number of explanatory principles to as few as possible. This occurs through a progressive process of recovering something in another thing, then in that reduced something finding yet another thing, and so on.⁶⁸⁷

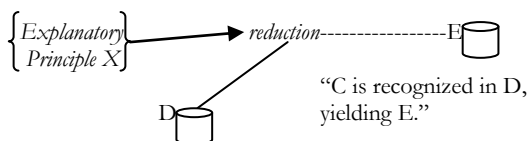
Therefore, the number of explanatory principles used virtually can serve as a measure of the level of knowledge achieved, with the highest level being that which explains with the minimum number of principles that are not themselves requiring further explanation. To make this minimum as small as possible is the ultimate task of knowing (*Erkennens*).⁶⁸⁸

So our picture becomes more like this:

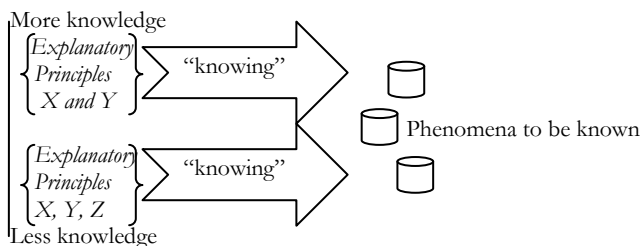


⁶⁸⁷ Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, Part One, §3 [German, 12] (Blumberg, 13): *Soviel ist klar: auf die geschilderte Weise wird die Zahl der Erscheinungen, die durch ein und dasselbe Prinzip erklärt werden, immer größer, und demnach die Zahl der zur Erklärung der Gesamtheit der Erscheinungen nötigen Prinzipien immer kleiner.*

⁶⁸⁸ Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, Part One, §3 [German, 12–13] (Blumberg, 13–14). Last sentence: *Dies Minimum möglichst klein zu machen, ist also die letzte Aufgabe des Erkennens.*



And to it might be added the results of the above process:



As the process continues there should be a reduction through clear explanations so that fewer and fewer principles are required for more and more phenomena.

Schlick believes this procedure is the normal one in the natural sciences and he extols physics as the best example. If knowledge is progressively achieved by the reduction of the number of explanatory principles required to recognize things, then it behooves philosophy to pay attention and learn from the sciences.

Intuitive Ideas & Concepts

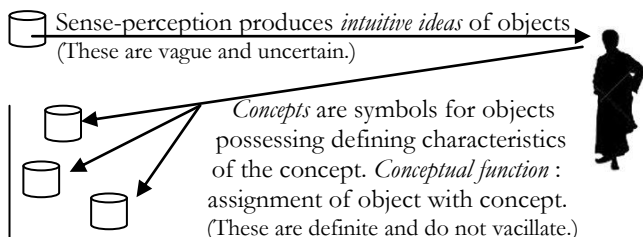
While *intuitive ideas* of phenomena are relied upon in everyday knowing, these are vague by nature and do not permit the kind of precise identification that scientific knowledge seeks.⁶⁸⁹ So, one must turn to *concepts*.

⁶⁸⁹ Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, Part One, §4: Knowing by Means of Images.

“A concept (*Begriff*),” writes Schlick, “differs from an intuitive image (*anschaulichen Vorstellung*) in being completely definite; no vacillation is found in it.” It plays the “role of a sign,” i.e., it is a *symbol* for the objects that possesses the defining characteristics of the concept.⁶⁹⁰

Concepts are not ‘real’ in the sense that an object is. Concepts require in the mind some way to be represented and in verbal thinking this occurs through language. Words, like names, can be fixed in meaning. Science, as much as possible, uses language to designate concepts. But if concepts as such are unreal, *conceptual function*—what a concept does as a sign—is very real. The conceptual function is denotation (*Bezeichnen*), which Schlick explains means simply that an *assignment is made associating an object with a concept*.⁶⁹¹

We now have this picture emerging:



The process Schlick has in mind is a *correspondence theory of truth* by which concepts are reliably paired with

⁶⁹⁰ Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, Part One, §5: Knowing by Means of Concepts [German, 19] (Blumberg, 20). “Role of a sign”: *die Rolle eines Zeichens*.

⁶⁹¹ Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, Part One, §5 [German, 20–22] (Blumberg, 21–23). *Bezeichnen* is translated by Blumberg as “signifying or designating.” One might also use “betoken” or “label.” The word “assignment” is *Zuordnen*; “associating” is *zugeordnet*.

real objects so that truth and knowledge eventuate when a mental representation expressed linguistically in a concept faithfully corresponds to an actual existing phenomenon.

Schlick criticizes Phenomenology for obfuscating what needs to be done by endlessly distinguishing among modes and acts of consciousness, thus sorting and differentiating rather than actually reducing. Thus, at best, it can only prepare the way for knowledge and not itself achieve it.⁶⁹²

Schlick thinks the process of denoting through definite concepts raises scientific knowing above what we do in everyday knowing. However, it can be questioned whether concepts ever free themselves entirely from intuition with its comparison of perceptual images with images held in memory. Non-intuitive experiences of consciousness also are plagued with uncertainty and so the issue of certainty remains in question—and certainty is the goal of a theory of knowledge. The only way out of the conundrum that consigns us to Skepticism is to find some way in which concepts are freed from dependence on intuition.⁶⁹³

The Role of Implicit Definitions

The science of mathematics provides the clue that logic requires: *implicit definitions*. By means of such, mathematicians—and by extension scientists—can secure certainty by presenting basic concepts in such a manner that the validity of the axioms related to those concepts

⁶⁹² Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, Part One, §5 [German, 22–23] (Blumberg, 23–24).

⁶⁹³ Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, §6: The Limits of Definition [German, 25–29] (Blumberg, 27–31).

are guaranteed. The simple solution resolves down to this: define basic concepts by the fact that they satisfy their axioms. This frees up science to pursue the intellectual task of *inference*—"that is, in deriving new judgments from old ones."⁶⁹⁴

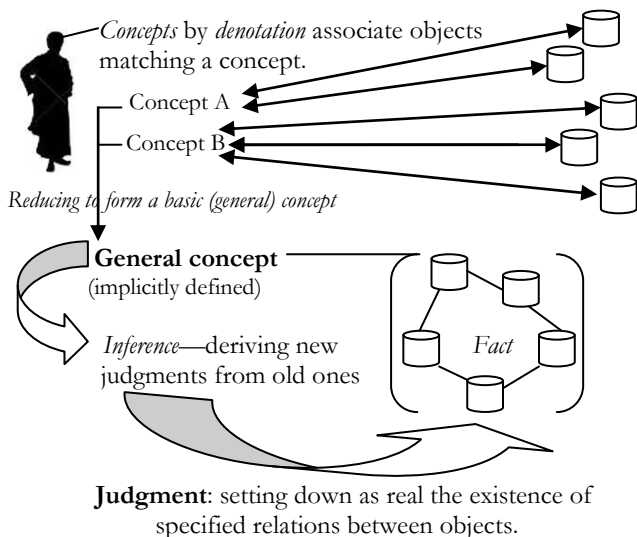
Judgments

This leads Schlick into examining the nature of *judgments*. Concepts exist so that judgments can be made about phenomena. Schlick is not concerned to define judgments as a psychological act; he intends instead to consider their epistemological significance. Because concepts are signs used functionally to associate objects with ideas, it is natural to see judgments also as signs—in this instance, *as setting down both the relations between objects and the existence of those relations* (e.g., "the snow is cold"). The latter element is the essence of a judgment and why judgments thus are *signs for facts*. They designate facts whether conceptual or real, meaning they express an affirmation of the existence of a relationship between real objects ("snow is cold"), or among concepts (" $2 \times 2 = 4$ "). Since, as we have seen, concepts are as such unreal, to speak of their existence in a judgment means to express that they are without contradiction. Therefore, *facts* are comprised of two or

⁶⁹⁴ Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, §7: Implicit Definitions [German, 29–36] (Blumberg, 31–39). Schlick [German, 31] (Blumberg, 33) explains that implicit definition = definition by axioms = definition by postulates. Quote [German, 31] (Blumberg, 33): *das heißt im Ableiten neuer Urteile aus alten*.

more objects and the relations among them—and this means they have complexity.⁶⁹⁵

Concepts and judgments coexist in complex relationships. But it is in the interconnection of concepts and judgments that the essence of knowledge exists.⁶⁹⁶ We now can add this picture:



The Role of Language Analysis

Schlick affirms that “the great task of knowledge” (*die große Aufgabe der Erkenntnis*) is “to designate individual or particular objects by means of general con-

⁶⁹⁵ Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, §8: The Nature of Judgments [German, 36–41] (Blumberg, 39–44). “Judgments”: *Urteils*; “facts”: *Tatsachen*.

⁶⁹⁶ Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, §8: The Nature of Judgments [German, 41–44] (Blumberg, 44–47).

cepts.”⁶⁹⁷ But is only in linguistic formulations that judgments can be fixed.⁶⁹⁸ For the logical positivist, knowledge is borne in language and the epistemological task is not *adding* to the store of knowledge or *securing certainty* of whatever is claimed to be known, but instead *clarifying* knowledge claims by logical analysis of statements.⁶⁹⁹ In his 1932 essay “Positivism and Realism,” Schlick writes, “It is the true (*eigentliche*) business of philosophy to seek for and clarify the *meaning* of claims and questions.”⁷⁰⁰

Philosophy becomes the partner of the natural sciences, and like them should be invested in becoming more like physics, the Queen of the sciences. As Schlick expresses it in his essay “The Turning Point in Philosophy” (*Die Wende der Philosophie*):

We now recognize philosophy—and this is thereby the great turning point positively marked in the present—is a system of acts rather than a system of knowledge. It is the activity by which the meaning of statements is es-

⁶⁹⁷ Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, §9: Judging and Knowing [German,] (Blumberg, 58): *individuelle oder besondere Gegenstände mit Hilfe allgemeiner Begriffe zu bezeichnen*.

⁶⁹⁸ Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, §8 [German, 44] (Blumberg, 47).

⁶⁹⁹ Ginsburg, “On the Logical Positivism of the Vienna Circle,” 122, observes, “Knowledge is thus defined as the communication of structure by means of symbols (language).”

⁷⁰⁰ Schlick, “Positivism and Realism” (“Positivismus und Realismus”), II: On the Meaning of Statements. [German, 329] (Rynin, 40): *Es ist das eigentliche Geschäft der Philosophie, den Sinn von Behauptungen und Fragen zu suchen und klarzumachen*.

tablished, or revealed. By philosophy sentences are clarified (*geklärt*), by which sciences are verified (*verifiziert*).⁷⁰¹

Schlick declares that, "The meaning of a proposition obviously rests solely in that it expresses a certain fact."⁷⁰² Shortly thereafter he adds:

Thus, in order to find the meaning of a proposition, we must transform it by introducing successive definitions, until finally there are only words which can no further be defined, but whose meanings can only be shown directly. The criterion for the truth or falsity of the proposition lies in the fact that under certain conditions (specified in the definitions) certain conditions exist or are absent. When this is ascertained, everything that has been mentioned in the proposition is established, and I thereby know its meaning.⁷⁰³

Verifiability

⁷⁰¹ Schlick, "The Turning Point," [German, 8] (Rynin, 56): *Wir erkennen jetzt in ihr—und damit ist die große Wendung in der Gegenwart positiv gekennzeichnet—anstatt eines Systems von Erkenntnissen ein System von Akten; sie ist nämlich diejenige Tätigkeit, durch welche der Sinn der Aussagen festgestellt oder aufgedeckt wird. Durch die Philosophie werden Sätze geklärt, durch die Wissenschaften verifiziert.*

⁷⁰² Schlick, "Positivism and Realism," II [German, 330] (Rynin, 40): *Der Sinn eines Satzes liegt ja offenbar allein darin, daß er einen bestimmten Tatbestand ausdrückt.*

⁷⁰³ Schlick, "Positivism and Realism," II: On the Meaning of Statements. [German, 330–31] (Rynin, 40): *Hiernach müssen wir, um den Sinn eines Satzes zu finden, ibndurch Einführung sukzessiver Definitionen umformen, bis schließlich nur noch solche Worte in ihm vorkommen, die nicht mehr definiert, sondern deren Bedeutungen nur noch direkt aufgezeigt werden können. Das Kriterium für die Wahrheit oder Falschheit des Satzes liegt dann darin, daß unter bestimmten (in den Definitionen angegebenen) Bedingungen gewisse Gegebenheiten vorliegen oder nicht vorliegen. Ist dies festgestellt, so ist alles festgestellt, wovon in dem Satze die Rede war, und damit weiß ich eben seinen Sinn.*

The key in all this is the notion of *verifiability*. A statement's meaning is only specifiable to the degree that it is *testable*. The truth or falsity of a statement cannot otherwise be assessed. Testability is only in principle (*prinzipiell*); it is thinkable (*denkbar*) and logically possible (*logisch möglich*).⁷⁰⁴ But it remains indispensable. Schlick affirms, "I find the principle that the meaning of every proposition is completely determined in its verification in the given to be a legitimate, unassailable kernel of the 'positivist' movement."⁷⁰⁵

Remember, as we saw Schlick say above, knowledge everywhere is one. When he turns to science and the definition of knowledge he remarks that with respect to ordinary knowing, "science (*Wissenschaft*) by no means gets a new, special meaning; the essence of knowing (*Erkennen*) here as there is the same."⁷⁰⁶ But science does better than everyday knowing precisely because of its care with language and its commitment to verifiability.

Verifiability open up a path to epistemological certainty. Schlick, in a 1934 paper on that very matter, notes that the traditional aim in epistemology is *certainty*. "All great attempts to justify a theory of knowledge

⁷⁰⁴ Schlick, "Positivism and Realism," II: On the Meaning of Statements. [German, 332] (Rynin, 41).

⁷⁰⁵ Schlick, "Positivism and Realism," Results, 1. [German, 360] (Rynin, 54): *Als berechtigter, unangreifbarer Kern der "positivistischen" Richtungen erscheint mir das Prinzip, daß der Sinn jedes Satzes restlos in seiner Verifikation im Gegebenen beschlossen liegt.*

⁷⁰⁶ Schlick, *General Theory of Knowledge*, Part One, §3 [German ed., 8] (Blumberg, 9): *Dennoch wird sich sogleich zeigen, daß es in der Wissenschaft keineswegs einen neuen, ganz besonderen Sinn bekommt, sondern daß das Wesentliche beim Erkennen hier wie dort ganz dasselbe ist.* [Quoted material is in its immediate context.]

(*Theorie des Erkennens*),” he writes at the start of his paper, “spring from the question of the certainty of human knowledge (*Wissens*), and this question in turn springs from the wish for absolute certainty of knowledge (*absoluter Gewißheit der Erkenntnis*).”⁷⁰⁷ Logical Positivism is no exception; logical positivists also seek such certainty.

The way they first hoped to achieve it was in their new method with its attention to language and especially to what they saw as the most fundamental types of utterances. And, in their eyes, they had success. Schlick remarks, “It seems to me to mean a great improvement in the method, that one does not pursue the primary *facts*, but rather the primary *sentences*, in order to arrive at the foundation of knowledge (*fundament der Erkenntnis*).”⁷⁰⁸ But what he refers to as “primary sentences” became part of a debate within logical positivist circles concerning the nature of the most fundamental statements of knowledge. Such sentences were variously named, with “protocol sentences” being the most common label.⁷⁰⁹

Schlick in the mid-1930s realizes the way this matter had come to be understood—gain or not over previous conceptions—fell short and ended as untenable.

⁷⁰⁷ Schlick, “The Foundation of Knowledge” (*Über das Fundament der Erkenntnis*), I [German ed., 79] (Rynin, 209): *Alle großen Versuche der Begründung einer Theorie des Erkennens entspringen aus der Frage nach der Sicherheit menschlichen Wissens, und diese Frage wiederum entspringt aus dem Wunsche nach absoluter Gewißheit der Erkenntnis.*

⁷⁰⁸ Schlick, “The Foundation of Knowledge,” II [German ed., 82] (Rynin, 212): *Es scheint mir eine große Verbesserung der Methode zu bedeuten, daß man nicht nach den primären Tatsachen, sondern nach den primären Sätzen suchte, um zum Fundament der Erkenntnis zu gelangen.*

⁷⁰⁹ Other names included “basic sentences” and “atomic sentences.”

Rather than providing any certainty the issues involved in verifiability proved more daunting than had been naively believed at the start of the movement. Under internal pressures of mounting differences within the group, as well as the substantial pressures of the external world under the power of the Nazis, the Vienna Circle unraveled. Schlick himself fell victim to the violence of the age, being assassinated by a student in June, 1936, at the age of 54.⁷¹⁰

Analytical Philosophy: The Later Wittgenstein

Later Analytical Philosophy is especially associated with Wittgenstein's other major work, the posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations* (*Philosophische Untersuchungen*). One reviewer notes of it that, "A likely first reaction to the book will be to regard it as a puzzling collection of reflections that are sometimes individually brilliant, but possess no unity, present no system of ideas."⁷¹¹ Indeed, Wittgenstein himself in the book's Preface notes that what is within is in the manner of "remarks" (*Bemerkungen*) organized into short sections and ranging across a wide number of topics.⁷¹²

Our interest, of course, is confined to the topic of knowledge. We might start, though, with the book's relation to his earlier *Tractatus*. Here Wittgenstein takes himself to task with regard to that earlier work. Specifi-

⁷¹⁰ See Stadler, *Vienna Circle*, 597–632.

⁷¹¹ Malcolm, "Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*," 530. Of course, Malcolm points out there is a unity, detectable under careful scrutiny.

⁷¹² Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Preface. All translations of the German are mine, but reference to Anscombe will aid in checking an alternative rendering.

cally, he has come to see that what he wrote in the *Tractatus* was too narrow and limited a view of language.⁷¹³

In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein starts with Augustine's view of language that conceives of sentences as combinations of names, where every word has meaning and each word's meaning is correlated with that word. This view can be seen as a *primitive language* and such a language often enough pertains.⁷¹⁴ But, he later muses, merely to say every word signifies something in itself says nothing without further specification.⁷¹⁵

Language Games

Wittgenstein has come to realize that language use in real life is far more robust than he had first thought. The vitality and diversity of actual language use is caught by the metaphor of *games with rules*.⁷¹⁶ He now says, "we can also imagine that the whole process of using words . . . is like one of those games by which

⁷¹³ There is a kind of running dialog with the *Tractatus* in many places, but some explicit remarks occur, too (e.g., §§114–15).

⁷¹⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, §§1–2 (2–3). In the German/English edition the German page (Indicated here in parentheses) is followed by the English translation with the page marked by a superscript e (e.g., 2^e). Cf. §43 (20) where he says that for a large class of cases it is true that "the meaning of a word is its use in language" (*Die Bedeutung eines Wortes ist sein Gebrauch in der Sprache*)—but not for all cases.

⁷¹⁵ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, §13 (7).

⁷¹⁶ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, §3 (3): *Es ist, als erklärte jemand: "Spielen besteht darin, daß man Dinge, gewissen Regeln gemäß, auf einer Fläche verschiebt. . . ."*—"It's as if someone explained, 'A game consists of moving things on a surface according to certain rules' (*gewissen Regeln gemäß*)."

children learn their native tongue.”⁷¹⁷ He adds that it is easy to imagine an innumerable variety of languages, “And to imagine a language means to imagine a way of life.”⁷¹⁸ The connection is a key one; language analysis exists within lived experiences—*cultures*.

He points out that there are countless kinds of sentences or propositions (*Sätze*)—and they come and go as new ones are created and others become forgotten. “The word ‘language-game’ here,” he notes, “is intended to emphasize that *speaking* a language is part of an activity, or way of life.”⁷¹⁹ In this context, with all its dynamic diversity, it is nonsensical to suppose that any one element or principle is in common among all language games. Wittgenstein is emphatic: “Instead of stating that there is something common to everything we call language, I say that these phenomena have not one thing in common to make us use the same word applied to all.” Instead, in all their diversity there are *relationships*.⁷²⁰ This means the proper approach is stop looking for some grand common principle or element and see rather how similarities and certain kinds of rela-

⁷¹⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, §7 (5): *Wir können uns auch denken, daß der ganze Vorgang des Gebrauchs der Worte . . . eines jener Spiele ist, mittels welcher Kinder ihre Muttersprache erlernen.*

⁷¹⁸ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, §19 (8): *Und eine Sprache vorstellen heißt, sich eine Lebensform vorstellen.*

⁷¹⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, §23 (11): *Das Wort ‘Sprachspiel’ soll hier hervorheben, daß das Sprechen der Sprache ein Teil ist einer Tätigkeit, oder einer Lebensform.* At the end of this section he refers to his present position with respect to his earlier one in the *Tractatus*.

⁷²⁰ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, §65 (31): *Statt etwas anzugeben, was allem, was wir Sprache nennen, gemeinsam ist, sage ich, es ist diesen Erscheinungen garnicht Eines gemeinsam, weswegen wir für alles das gleiche Wort verwenden.*

tionships emerge so that we can speak instead of ‘family resemblances’ (*Familienähnlichkeiten*).⁷²¹

⁷²¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, §§66–68 (31–32). Cf. §108 (46).

Wittgenstein recalls a conversation with Frank P. Ramsey (1903–1930). Ramsey had tried to convince him that logic is a ‘normative science,’ an idea Wittgenstein later interprets as being like “that in philosophy we can often *compare* the use of words with games—calculi according to fixed rules—but we can not say whoever uses the language, *must* play such a game.” A logician might attempt the construction of an ideal language according to fixed rules, but that hubristically claims (as was the case in the *Tractatus*) such a thing would be better than the everyday language we actually use.⁷²²

The relation between language and *rule use* occupies considerable attention for Wittgenstein. He likens what happens among philosophers analyzing a language to being like a spectator watching people playing with a ball where they start but leave incomplete various games, punctuating the intervals with just throwing the ball around, all the while joking, and then that onlooker claiming that all along the players have been adhering to definite rules. Why, asks Wittgenstein, can’t we just admit that maybe people make up rules as they go and change them as they like? This is why he says that not every time a word is used it is bound by rules. He observes that a rule is like a signpost that has more than one way it can be interpreted.⁷²³

⁷²² Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, §81 (38): *daß wir nämlich in der Philosophie den Gebrauch der Wörter oft mit Spieelen, Kalkülen nach festen Regeln, vergleichen, aber nicht sagen können, wer die Sprache gebraucht, müsse ein solches Spiel spielen.*

⁷²³ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, §§83–5 (39–40). On rules and rule-following, see §§138–242, discussed in McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, 73–142.

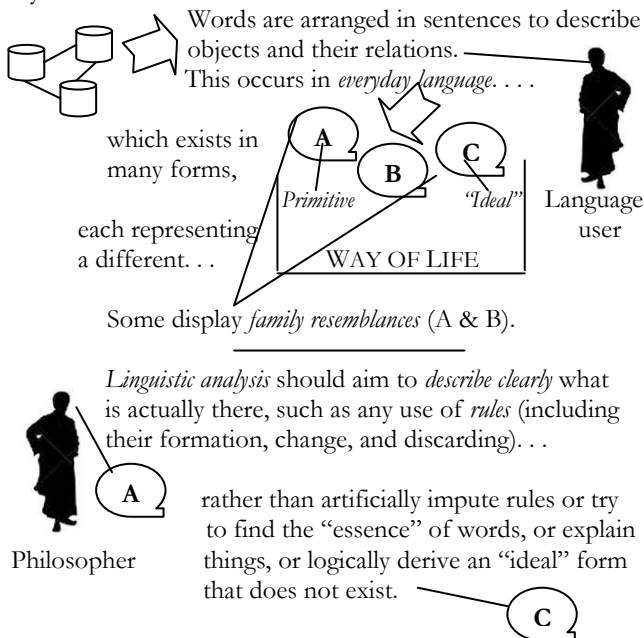
Wittgenstein complains that when philosophers try to get at the essence of a word like “knowledge” (*Wissen*) what they are really doing is wresting the term from its common use. What he wants to do instead is “return the words from their metaphysical to their ordinary use.” Philosophers keep bumping up against language. The very form of a philosophical problem is simply, “I don’t know anything” (*Ich kenne mich nicht aus*). In the end, the philosophical task is simply to describe the use of language for it cannot effectively interfere with such use. So, philosophy must *clarify* problems and that means accurate *description* rather than explanation. The result is freedom from metaphysical—and other—anxieties in discovering that rather than *a* philosophical method there are methods, functioning like different therapies (*Therapien*).⁷²⁴

The *Philosophical Investigations* produce a strong effect among English-speaking philosophers. Along with other notable figures such as G. E. Moore, Gilbert Ryle (1900–1976) and A. J. Ayer (1910–1989), Wittgenstein’s programme for philosophy as a professional discipline dedicated to clarifying matters through linguistic analysis comes to dominate British and American philosophy for a quarter-century.⁷²⁵

⁷²⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, §§116–33 (48–51). 1st quote §116 (48): *Wir führen die Wörter von ihrer metaphysischen, wieder auf ihre alltägliche Verwendung zurück*. 2nd quote §123 (49). On the last point, cf. §255 (91): *Der Philosoph behandelt eine Frage, wie eine Krankheit*—“The philosopher deals with a question like he was handling a disease.”

⁷²⁵ For a brief review of its impact and an assessment of why it faltered and fell apart, see Lavine, *From Socrates to Sartre*, 408–11.

How might we picture the later Wittgenstein's view of linguistic analysis to provide a simple overview? Let's try this:



Though Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* has come to prize description and disavow theory building, he has hardly given up a keen interest in the matter of what knowledge is and how it relates to things like certainty and belief. But for such thoughts we must turn to the 676 notebook entries he composed in the last 18 months of his life that were posthumously published under the title *On Certainty* (*Über Gewissheit*). In addition, we must briefly touch upon a figure who merits far more attention, and whose thinking proves the inspirational spark for Wittgenstein.

George Edward Moore (1873–1954), a long time colleague of Wittgenstein at Cambridge, represents one side of a division within Linguistic Philosophy between those, like Russell, the early Wittgenstein, and A. J. Ayer who seek through logic to reform language in the direction of an ideal form, and others like himself who desire to study ordinary language and undertake to defend it as an acceptable way—and preferable to metaphysics—to speak about the world.

In his 1925 essay, “A Defence of Common Sense,” Moore presents a list of propositions about which he declares them all as something “I *know*, with certainty, to be true,” and alongside these a single assertion about a class of propositions which is also a statement he affirms as knowing, with certainty, to be true.⁷²⁶ By “true” he means entirely so—not merely partially—and that such truth can adhere to the meaning of ordinary language expressions, such as ‘This is a human hand.’ Thus, when a person uses language in an ordinary manner we can and do understand its meaning.⁷²⁷

He considers the possibility that rather than knowledge with certainty all he actually has is either belief or a relative knowledge of that which is highly probable. But Moore insists he does *know* them, though in most cases only indirectly, as a result of other propositions known to be true which provide evidence for those now I question. He calls this position the ‘Common Sense view of the world.’⁷²⁸

⁷²⁶ Moore, “Defence of Common Sense,” 32.

⁷²⁷ Moore, “Defence of Common Sense,” 35–37.

⁷²⁸ Moore, “Defence of Common Sense,” 43–45.

Wittgenstein in his uncompleted *On Certainty* returns again and again to Moore's position, raising questions, wrestling with its implications, and presenting counterpoints.⁷²⁹ Despite its fragmentary and unpolished nature, the work remains the best source we possess for Wittgenstein's views about knowledge. By their very nature they do not constitute a complete or unified position, but they are often provocative and worth our spending a little time with them.⁷³⁰

Wittgenstein early marks the close association of knowledge and certainty⁷³¹ with his comment that, "The difference between the concept (*Begriff*) 'knowing' (*wissen*) and the concept 'being certain' (*sicher sein*) is not of great importance, except where 'I know' means: I *can't* be wrong."⁷³² He distinguishes between two kind of certainty: *psychological* (subjective) and *epistemic* (objective).⁷³³ With respect to doubt and certainty, he

⁷²⁹ For a discussion of the two philosophers together, see Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*.

⁷³⁰ There have developed a number of distinct interpretive approaches to this work. On that matter, see Moyal-Sharrock and Brenner, *Readings*.

⁷³¹ Moyal-Sharrock, "Unravelling Certainty," 76, comments, "Much of *On Certainty* is devoted to fleshing out the distinction between certainty and knowledge."

⁷³² Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (*Über Gewissheit*), ¶8 [4]. The renderings from the German are mine and page references are to the German edition (noted by [] with page numbers; the English translation is usually within a page or so of this but it is easiest to find texts by following the numbering of notebook entries). I've used the pilcrow symbol for his entries rather than a § mark—neither being entirely suited here—as better fitting the aphoristic character of the text and also better than suggesting a page number by not using any mark.

⁷³³ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶194 [19].

comments, “‘Whoever wanted to doubt everything, would not come to any doubt. The game of doubt itself presupposes certainty.’”⁷³⁴

The relation between knowledge (*Wissen*) and belief (*Glaube*) also receives Wittgenstein’s attention. He regards these as conceptually distinct: “‘Knowledge’ (*Wissen*) and ‘certainty’ (*Sicherheit*) belong to different categories. There are not two ‘states of mind’ such as ‘presumption’ (*Vermuten*) and ‘being sure’ (*Sichersein*).”⁷³⁵ Still, they are not necessarily psychologically different:

You can say, ‘He believes it, but it’s not like that,’ but you can’t say, ‘He knows it, but it’s not like that.’ Does this difference come from a diversity of mental states for faith and knowledge? No. ‘State of mind’ (*Seelenzustand*) can be termed, for example, what is expressed by tone of voice, in gestures, etc. It would therefore be *possible* to speak of a mental state of conviction, and it can be the same, whether it is known (*gewußt*) or falsely believed (*fälschlich geglaubt*). To say that the words ‘believe’ (*glauben*) and ‘know’ (*wissen*) must correspond to different mental states would be as if one believed that the words ‘I’ and the name ‘Ludwig’ must correspond to different people because the concepts are different.⁷³⁶

This situation means, as Wittgenstein observes, that even the most credible witness espousing knowledge cannot simply be taken at his or her word; the conviction expressed by proclaiming knowledge might only

⁷³⁴ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶115 [13].

⁷³⁵ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶308 [26–27 for entire text].

⁷³⁶ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶42 [7].

be belief—they can *feel* the same.⁷³⁷ Personal certainty (*Genißeheit*), he says, is like a ‘tone’—a particular quality of intonation or volume of sound by which one ‘locks in’ facts (*Tatbestand*); but one cannot infer just from such that a belief is warranted.⁷³⁸ The problem with belief lies in its deepest roots: “At the bottom of founded faith lies unfounded faith.”⁷³⁹

Wittgenstein says, “What I know (*weiß*), that I believe (*glaube*).”⁷⁴⁰ In a conceptual hierarchy knowledge sits higher than belief in that all knowledge entails belief, but not all belief is knowledge. Naturally, it is important to be able to tell when mere belief has passed on to actual knowledge. That means some *criterion* is needed.⁷⁴¹ Here Wittgenstein appears to fall back upon the notion of justified true belief. If all a person can mount for the reason for a belief is simply her or his assertion, then it isn’t knowledge. The latter requires “demonstrating the truth” (*Daruns der Wahrheit*).⁷⁴²

Language expressions are, of course, important to him. An expression such as the assertion ‘I know’

⁷³⁷ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶137 [15]. “Even if the most credible person assures me that he knows it is so and so, that alone cannot convince me that he knows.”

⁷³⁸ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶30 [6].

⁷³⁹ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶253 [23]—a cryptic remark!

⁷⁴⁰ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶177 [18].

⁷⁴¹ Snowden, “Wittgenstein on Knowledge,” 175, writes, “The core idea of criteria is twofold. The criterion for a certain feature is something that if it is determined to obtain means conclusively that the feature is present. That is an epistemological aspect. But further giving the criteria counts as defining what the condition is.”

⁷⁴² Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶243 [22]. This text is considered again shortly. The latter portion reads: “But if what he believes is such that the reasons he can give are no more certain than his assertion, then he cannot say that he *knows* what he believes.”

(prominent in Moore) is a specialized one about which Wittgenstein says, “For ‘I know’ (*Ich weiß*) . . . appears to describe a fact that guarantees what is known as a fact.”⁷⁴³ He returns to this formulation of ‘I know’ repeatedly, making various related points. These include:

1. Knowledge assertions occur in a *language-game context*.
2. They relate to *fact*, not meaning.
3. They entail a *judgment*.
4. They point to *truth* based on *warrant*.
5. They affirm a *certainty* of possession.
6. They are personally *persuasive*.

The first basic point is that ‘I know’ represents a declaration of grounds sufficient for an assertion such that another person conversant with the language game at play will recognize and accept the assertion:

“I know” often stands for: I have the right reasons for my statement. So if someone else knows my language game, he would admit that I know that. The other person has to be able to imagine, when he knows the language-game, *how* to know such a thing.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴³ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶¶11–12 [4–5] (Paul and Anscombe, 3e). The quote is from ¶12: *Denn ‘Ich weiß . . .’ scheint einen Tatbestand zu beschreiben, der das Gewußte als Tatsache verbürgt.*

⁷⁴⁴ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶18 [5]: “*‘Ich weißes’ heißt oft: Ich habe die richtigen Gründe für meine Aussage. Wenn also der Andre das Sprachspiel kennt, so würde er zugeben, daß ich das weiß. Der Andre muß sich, wenn er das Sprachspiel kennt, vorstellen können, wie man so etwas wissen kann.* Cf. ¶560 [47]: “And the concept of knowing is coupled with that of the language-game.” Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein*, 7, comments, “One might say that for him propositions evincing knowledge claims belong to the language game, whereas certainty grounds the language

Second, the assertion is rooted in a very old sense of perception ('I see ____') and thus properly is related to facts rather than meaning: "'I know' has a primitive meaning similar to that of 'I see.' ('Knowledge,' 'videre') . . . 'I know' should express a relationship, not between me and a sense of meaning (like 'I believe'), but between myself and a fact."⁷⁴⁵

Third, such an assertion carries an element of judgment—of making a decision: "We ask ourselves: What do we do with a statement 'I *know* ...'? For we are not concerned with processes or states of mind. And so you have to decide if something is a knowledge or not."⁷⁴⁶

Fourth, Wittgenstein seems to endorse the popular view of knowledge as justified true belief,⁷⁴⁷ declaring, "'I know ...' they say, when you're ready to give compelling reasons. 'I know' refers to a possibility of demonstrating the truth. Whether one knows something, one can show, assuming that he is convinced of it."⁷⁴⁸

game and is a condition of its possibility." It has been argued that Wittgenstein is appealing to an idea of knowledge as 'recognition-as-acknowledgment' (*Anerkennung*)—see ¶378 [72]—i.e., as contextual and interpersonal within a given language-game.

⁷⁴⁵ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶90 [11]: "*Ich weiß*«" hat eine primitive Bedeutung, ähnlich und verwandt der von "*Ich sehe*". ("Wissen", "videre"). . . "*Ich weiß*«" sollte eine Beziehung ausdrücken, nicht zwischen mir und einem Satzsinne (wie "*Ich Glaube*"), sondern zwischen mir und einer Tatsache.

⁷⁴⁶ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶230 [21]: *Wir fragen uns: Was machen wir mit einer Aussage 'Ich weiß ...'? Denn uns han-delt sich's nicht um Vorgänge oder Zustände des Geistes. Und so muß man entscheiden, ob etwas ein Wissen ist oder keines.*

⁷⁴⁷ Moyal-Sharrock, "Unravelling Certainty," 77.

⁷⁴⁸ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶243 [22]: "*Ich weiß ...*" sagt man, wenn man bereit ist, zwingende Gründe zu geben. "*Ich weiß*" bezieht sich auf eine Möglichkeit des Daraus der Wahrheit. Ob Einer etwas weiß, läßt sich zeigen,

Fifth, saying ‘I know’ equates to certainty—“I know = I know it for certain.”—but, Wittgenstein goes on to observe, there is always some question as to when this is objectively warranted. Experience is often appealed to as providing sufficient empirical warrant (both our own and that of trusted others).⁷⁴⁹ But it seems the kind of objective security Wittgenstein seeks can be *logical* but not *epistemic*—at least, not in the traditional sense.⁷⁵⁰ The point is, compelling grounds must underlie the “sureness” (*Sicherheit*) expressed.⁷⁵¹

angenommen, daß er davon überzeugt ist. Cf. ¶432 [37]: “The statement ‘I know ...’ can have its meaning only in connection with the rest of the evidence of ‘knowledge.’” Also see ¶16 [5]: “‘If I know something, I also know that I know it, etc.,’ says, ‘I know that,’ as in, ‘I am infallible about it.’ Whether I actually am that, however, must be determined objectively.”

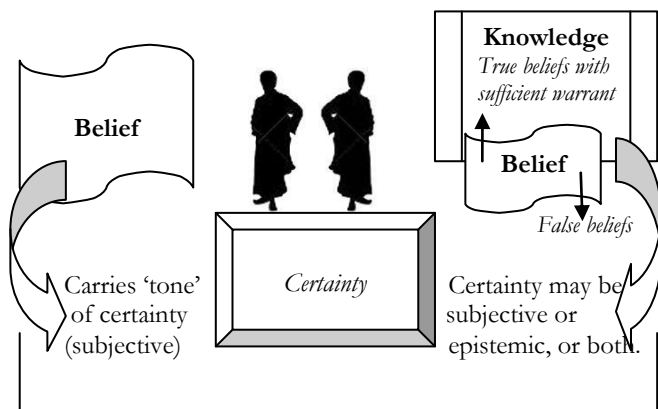
⁷⁴⁹ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶272 [24]: *Ich weiß = Es ist mir als gewiß bekannt.*

⁷⁵⁰ See Moyal-Sharrock, “Unravelling Certainty,” 78. Cf. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶194 [19]: “With the word ‘certain’ (*gewiß*) we express a complete conviction, the absence of any doubt, and we try to convince others. That is *subjective* certainty. But what is objectively certain?—If a mistake is not possible. But what is the possibility of that? Must such error not be logically excluded?”

⁷⁵¹ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶270 [24]. I use “sureness” rather than the more ordinary “security,” which in this context would be misleading. Though both can be translated “certainty,” *Sicherheit* differs from *Genissheit*. One possible difference lies in *Sicherheit* providing the kind of “surety” or “security” that holds up in business or a court of law. But Bearn, *Waking to Wonder*, 190–92 suggests that the sense in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* of *Sicherheit*, which he translates as “security,” cares both an evidential and nonevidential sense, with that latter related to ‘being without care’: “In its nonevidential sense, security is not a matter of evidence, it is an affair of the heart.” This sense he also finds in *On Certainty*. On these two words in Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*, see Sundholm, “Vocabulary,” 205. Also see Baldwin, “Wittgenstein and Moore,” 560.

Finally, the expression carries subjectively compelling grounds even if those are objectively meaningless: “Whether ‘I know’ something depends on whether the evidence suits me or contradicts me. For to say that one ‘knows’ that one has pain does not mean anything.”⁷⁵² Wittgenstein pointedly remarks, “What is the proof that I know something? Certainly not that I say I know it.”⁷⁵³ Personal persuasion may be an aspect of knowledge, but is not by itself sufficient.

Can all of this be illustrated? Perhaps we might venture the following picture:



LANGUAGE-GAME

(Context)

Linguistic Philosophy & Epistemology

⁷⁵² Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶504 [42]: *Ob ich etwas weiß, hängt davon ab, ob die Evidenz mir recht gibt oder mir wider-spricht. Denn zu sagen, man wisse, daß man Schmerzen habe, heißt nichts.* It is meaningless objectively absent any grounds to assess it.

⁷⁵³ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ¶487 [41]: *Was ist der Beweis dafür, daß ich etwas weiß? Doch gewiß nicht, daß ich sage, ich wisse es.*

The epistemology of Linguistic Philosophy as we have seen is focused not on securing metaphysical truths but rather clarifying scientific (and for some, ordinary) language expressions. Like other epistemologies, it wrestles with the issue of certainty.⁷⁵⁴ But as we have seen there are enough and substantial differences to how linguistic philosophers address knowledge to wonder if they should even be considered as doing epistemology (or anything else “philosophical”).⁷⁵⁵

There is a curious way in which Linguistic Philosophy can be termed an epistemology without knowledge. Ayer writes:

We see, then, that there is a sense in which analytic propositions do give us new knowledge. They call attention to linguistic usages, of which we might otherwise not be conscious, and they reveal unsuspected implications in our assertions and beliefs. But we can see also that there is a sense in which they can be said to add nothing to our knowledge. For they tell us only what we may be said to know already.⁷⁵⁶

Does this mean we are at an end?

⁷⁵⁴ See, for example, Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 16, 41 (with respect to the *a priori*); 37 (general propositions); 72 (versus probability in an empiricist framework); 85 (of logic and mathematics); 106 (subjective certainty); 120–21 (role in epistemology). As the citations indicate, this volume offers a good introduction to the many ways certainty is addressed as presented by one of the clearest and most popular advocates of Linguistic Philosophy. Ayer (127) writes, “[O]ur claims to empirical knowledge are not susceptible of a logical, but only a pragmatic, justification.”

⁷⁵⁵ See the criticism of Lavine, *From Socrates to Sartre*, 409 (bottom).

⁷⁵⁶ Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 74.

Chapter 16

Bergson's Intuition

While Phenomenology and Existentialism were dominating Continental philosophy in the 20th century, other epistemological positions still could be found. Among the most notable—and distinctive—is the intuitionism of Henri Bergson (1859–1941), in the late 19th–early 20th century. It is peculiar in that it is unusual (i.e., in formulating a distinctive epistemology), and even from our vantage point at times eccentric (e.g., contesting Einstein's relativity theories⁷⁵⁷).

Bergson, a French Jew, lives in a time of both increasing confidence in science and increasing irrational anti-Semitism. In his own country, though respected as the preeminent man of intellect, he also experiences constant suspicion for his distrust of both rationalism and science.

Bergson is most famous for his metaphysics, with his 1907 book *Creative Evolution* (*Évolution créatrice*) probably his most studied work. While we are focusing on his epistemology, it is intimately linked with his metaphysics. In fact, it is in his doing metaphysics we find his clearest exposition on the subject of intuition.

⁷⁵⁷ See Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity* (*Durée et Simultanéité*). Bergson and Einstein met in a public debate on April 6, 1922 in Paris—a debate that influenced the Nobel committee to not cite relativity as the grounds for its award of the Prize in Physics to Einstein. See Canales, *The Physicist and the Philosopher*.

Intuition

All of us have a sense of intuition, at least in the popular way that term is used. Intuition is typically used to suggest *a sudden, holistic grasp of a matter or insight into something*. Not infrequently a person experiences a moment when a matter previously murky becomes abruptly clear, or a matter one thought sufficiently known unexpectedly yields new depth. Intuition shows these characteristics:

1. *Holistic*: knowing grasps the whole rather than its parts. It is a way of knowing that is not piecemeal.
2. *Decisive*: intuition impresses itself upon the mind as absolutely certain.
3. *Penetrating*: the knowing is not superficial, but insightful (i.e., perceptive and deep).

Relative vs. Absolute Knowing

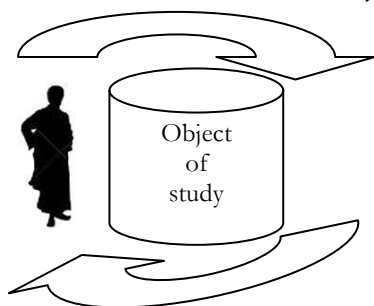
French philosopher Henri Bergson lends the idea of intuition a specific sense important to epistemology. He attempts to establish intuition as an objectively verifiable property of all human minds and as a method of knowing open to all. An exceptionally lucid and concise explanation of his concept of intuition (*intuition*) is offered at the beginning of his 1930 *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (*Introduction à la Métaphysique*):

If we compare the definitions of metaphysics with their conceptions of the absolute, we find that philosophers agree, in spite of their apparent differences, in distinguishing two profoundly different ways of knowing (*connaître*) something. The first implies that we move around this thing; the second, that we enter into it. The first depends on the point of view in which one places oneself and the symbols by which one expresses oneself. The second depends on no point of view and relies on

no symbol. From the first ‘knowledge’ (*connaissance*) it will be said that it stops at the relative; from the second, whenever it is possible, it reaches the absolute.⁷⁵⁸

This is easily pictured:

Two Ways of Knowing



¹Knowledge (*connaissance*) is relative, dependent on the position of the Knower, who is always outside the object, and requiring symbol use.



²Knowledge (*intuition*) is absolute (pure), independent of any point of view or use of symbols.

The term “absolute” is one we have encountered before. For Bergson, with respect to knowledge, it is a purity of knowing independent of the limitations of a

⁷⁵⁸ Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (*Introduction à la Métaphysique*) [French ed., 177–78] (Hulme, 1): *Si l'on compare entre elles les définitions de la métaphysique et les conceptions de l'absolu, on s'aperçoit que les philosophes s'accordent, en dépit de leurs divergences apparentes, à distinguer deux manières profondément différentes de connaître une chose. La première implique qu'on tourne autour de cette chose; la seconde, qu'on entre en elle. La première dépend du point de vue où l'on se place et des symboles par lesquels on s'exprime. La seconde ne se prend d'aucun point de vue et ne s'appuie sur aucun symbole. De la première connaissance on dira qu'elle s'arrête au relatif; de la seconde, là où elle est possible, qu'elle atteint l'absolu.*

particular vantage point outside an object. It provides an objectivity through direct experience that allows one to know an absolute reality—an object as it *is*.⁷⁵⁹

Bergson immediately elaborates on these first ideas:

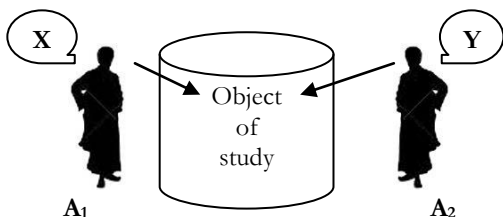
For example, take the movement of an object in space. I perceive it differently according to my point of view, whether moving or immobile, from where I look at it. I express it differently, according to the system of axes or points of reference to which I relate it, that is to say, according to the symbols by which I translate it. And I call it ‘relative’ for this double reason: in one case as in the other, I place myself outside the object itself. When I speak of an absolute movement, it is because I attribute to the moving thing an interior and ‘states of mind.’ It is also a matter that I sympathize with these states and I insert myself into them by an effort of imagination. Then, depending on whether the object will be moving or motionless, or depending on whether it will adopt one or another movement, my experience varies with it. What I feel will depend neither on the point of view that I could adopt respecting the object, since I will be in the object itself, nor upon symbols by which I could translate it, since I will have renounced any translation to own the original. In short, the movement will no longer be seized from outside and, as it were, from my own location, but from within itself, in itself. I will hold an absolute.⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵⁹ Jaffro, “Infinity, Intuition,” 92, writes, “Absolute knowledge is knowledge without symbols, through intuition only.”

⁷⁶⁰ Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (*Introduction à la Métaphysique*) [French ed., 178] (Hulme, 1–2): *Soit, par exemple, le mouvement d'un objet dans l'espace. Je le perçois différemment selon le point de vue, mobile ou immobile, d'où je le regarde. Je l'exprime différemment, selon le système d'axes ou de points de repère auquel je le rapporte, c'est-à-dire selon les symboles par lesquels je le traduis. Et je l'appelle relatif pour cette double raison : dans un cas comme dans l'autre, je me place en dehors de l'objet lui-même. Quand je parle*

Bergson is describing a method of *knowing* that is characterized by an *immediate, direct experience*. Of course, this knowing can be reduced to ‘knowledge’ in the form of symbols such as propositional content in speech or writing, but this is to move back outside the object, to place oneself at a distance from it, and thus be ‘relative’ to it. The experience of the object changes and the knowledge is both derivative and a ‘translation’ of the primary experience.⁷⁶¹

Again, pictures may help us with this matter. Let’s start with ‘relative knowing’ (*connaissance*):



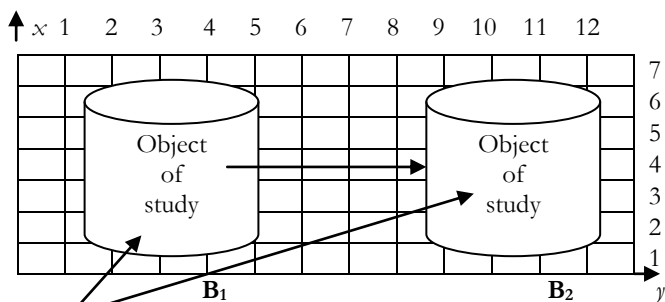
The Knower at position A_1 experiences the object of study differently than if at position A_2 . The experience is depen-

d'un mouvement absolu, c'est que j'attribue au mobile un intérieur et comme des états d'âme, c'est aussi que je sympathise avec les états et que je m'insère en eux par un effort d'imagination. Alors, selon que l'objet sera mobile ou immobile, selon qu'il adoptera un mouvement ou un autre mouvement, je n'éprouverai pas la même chose. Et ce que j'éprouverai ne dépendra ni du point de vue que je pourrais adopter sur l'objet, puisque je serai dans l'objet lui-même, ni des symboles par lesquels je pourrais le traduire, puisque j'aurai renoncé à toute traduction pour posséder l'original. Bref, le mouvement ne sera plus saisi du dehors et, en quelque sorte, de chez moi, mais du dedans, en lui, en soi. Je tiendrai un absolu.

⁷⁶¹ If absolute knowledge is complete, relative knowledge is incomplete. Moore, “Bergson and Pragmatism,” 409, pithily summarizes Bergson’s view as, “We know in part because we know in parts.”

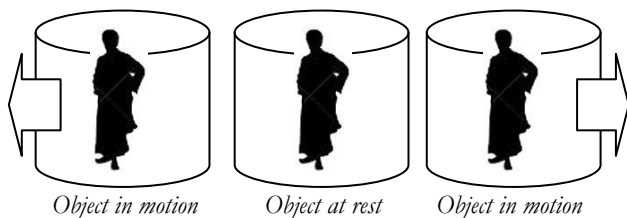
dent on her or his relative position to it. This leads to two different symbolic ‘translations’ (X or Y) of the object.

Or suppose the object is moving:



The Knower experiences the object in motion from the outside and so describes its movement by use of symbolic notations as moving from one location on a graph of x and y axes to another (from B_1 to B_2).

On the other hand, through intuition there is absolute knowledge because as the object moves or is motionless, the Knower inside remains *in the same position relative to the object* regardless of what the object is doing:



The basic difference between relative and absolute knowing is that in relative knowing the object is known in relation to the Knower, where in absolute knowing it is known in relation to itself. Thus *in absolute knowing the*

object is known as it knows itself. The experience of the Knower is continuous with the known.

Analysis vs. Intuition

As the illustrations show, the nature of a knowing experience and its communication are quite different depending on whether the knowing is relative or absolute. To make it clearer how they differ Bergson turns to two other important terms. He first explicitly uses the word “intuition” when he contrasts it with “analysis” (*l’analyse*). The new terms parallel “relative” and “absolute” so that we have two pairings:

relative/*analysis*

absolute/*intuition*

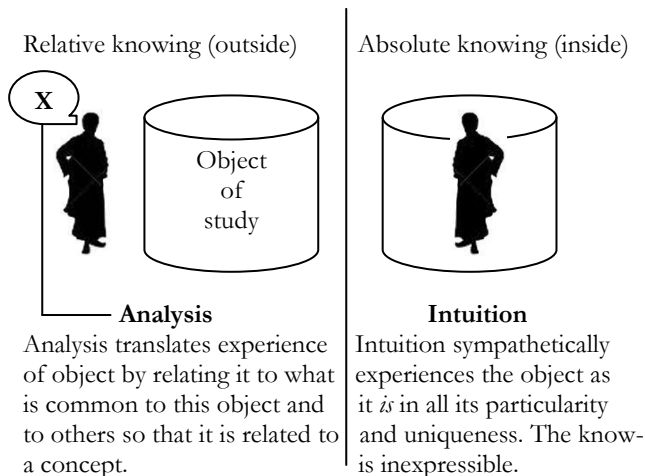
He then explains:

It follows that an absolute can only be given in an intuition, while all the rest is analysis. Here we call ‘intuition’ the sympathy with which one moves within an object to coincide with what is unique and therefore inexpressible. On the contrary, ‘analysis’ is the operation that brings the object back to elements already known, that is to say, elements common to this object and to others. To analyze is therefore to express a thing according to what it is *not*. All analysis is thus a translation, a development in symbols, a representation taken from successive points of view by which we note as many contacts between the new object that we now study, and others that we already think we know. In its eternally unfulfilled desire to embrace the object around which it is condemned to turn, analysis endlessly multiplies points of view to complete its persistently incomplete representation, relentlessly varying the symbols in trying to perfect its always imperfect

translation. It goes on forever. But intuition, if it is possible, is a simple act.⁷⁶²

This description is more elusive to illustrate but we might picture it this way:

Two Ways of Knowing



⁷⁶² Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics* [French ed., 181] (Hulme, 6–7): *Il suit de là qu'un absolu ne saurait être donné que dans une intuition, tandis que tout le reste relève de l'analyse. Nous appelons ici intuition la sympathie par laquelle on se transporte à l'intérieur d'un objet pour coïncider avec ce qu'il a d'unique et par conséquent d'inexprimable. Au contraire, l'analyse est l'opération qui ramène l'objet à des éléments déjà connus, c'est-à-dire communs à cet objet et à d'autres. Analyser consiste donc à exprimer une chose en fonction de ce qui n'est pas elle. Toute analyse est ainsi une traduction, un développement en symboles, une représentation prise de points de vue successifs d'où l'on note autant de contacts entre l'objet nouveau, qu'on étudie, et d'autres, que l'on croit déjà connaître. Dans son désir éternellement inassouvi d'embrasser l'objet autour duquel elle est condamnée à tourner, l'analyse multiplie sans fin les points de vue pour compléter la représentation toujours incomplète, varie sans relâche les symboles pour parfaire la traduction toujours imparfaite. Elle se continue donc à l'infini. Mais l'intuition, si elle est possible, est un acte simple.*

Intuition puts the knower into the movement of becoming that is reality. In other words, the experience of knowing is a oneness with the object so that as it moves the Knower's perception of it is a single, simple, and continuous experience—*holistic*. Bergson uses the term “sympathy” (*la sympathie*), a relationship of mutual-ly such that what affects one party simultaneously affects the other. It is the sort of felling one has when so identifying with another that the other person's emotional state becomes one's own.

Intuition as Sympathy

As we saw Bergson say, “I attribute to the moving thing an interior and ‘states of mind.’ It is also a matter that I sympathize with these states and I insert myself into them by an effort of imagination.” We need to carefully respect this language. Consider the elements he indicates:

1. *Attribution* of an *interior* and *states of mind*.
2. *Sympathy* with these states of mind.
3. *Imagination* to *insert* the self into them.

Superficially, the terms in this list look like a highly artificial set of conscious constructions—a kind of exercise in creative fiction. But Bergson does not mean it in such a way. To better understand what he intends we have to follow his examples.

Bergson offers the example of reading a novel and experiencing a *feeling of identity*—“a simple and indivisible feeling”—with the main character.⁷⁶³ The achievement of absolute knowing requires a “co-incidence”

⁷⁶³ Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics* [French ed., 179] (Hulme, 3): *le sentiment simple et indivisible*.

(*coincidence*) with the known—a correspondence in time and space as well as feeling of state of mind. The character is *alive*, not merely a collection of written, and partial descriptions of acts and character traits. The whole person is suddenly there and the reader is one with the character; they “coincide.” Such knowing is of the *essence* of the character (or any object), not merely a collection of traits and acts associated with it.

He also offers other examples. He speaks of an ongoing collection of photos of a town, a series providing ever more information—yet in their totality they never still equal the real town in which one walks. Similarly, all the possible translations of a poem, in however many languages and with however great nuance of meaning, never equal the meaning of the original itself. “A representation taken from a certain point of view, a translation made with certain symbols,” he writes, “these always remain imperfect in comparison with the object of which the view was taken or of which the symbols seek expression. But the absolute is perfect in that it is perfectly what it is.”⁷⁶⁴

Intuition as sympathetic imagination surpasses analysis in the same way that actual experience transcends description of it. No matter how much one says, or how carefully one says it, even though increased elaboration comes closer and closer to saying what the experience was like, it is never the same as having actually been there. Analysis is always an inferior substi-

⁷⁶⁴ Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics* [French ed., 180] (Hulme, 5): *Une représentation prise d'un certain point de vue, une traduction faite avec certains symboles, restent toujours imparfaites en comparaison de l'objet sur lequel la vue a été prise ou que les symboles cherchent à exprimer. Mais l'absolu est parfait en ce qu'il est parfaitement ce qu'il est.*

tute for direct experience.⁷⁶⁵ Bergson sums up the whole matter very neatly: “We here call intuition the sympathy with which one moves within an object to coincide with what is unique and therefore inexpressible.”⁷⁶⁶

The Nature of Science

Bergson is not anti-science. To regard it as *limited* is quite different from saying it is useless or incorrect. He notes that analysis lies at the heart of ordinary “positive science” (*la science positive*). Analysis stays outside the object, observing what it can from such a position, and reduces what is complex in reality to the simpler in order to be able to express it symbolically and compare it to other objects. Looked at in one way, what distinguishes metaphysics from science is that metaphysics dispenses with the symbols science depends upon.⁷⁶⁷

Knowing the Self

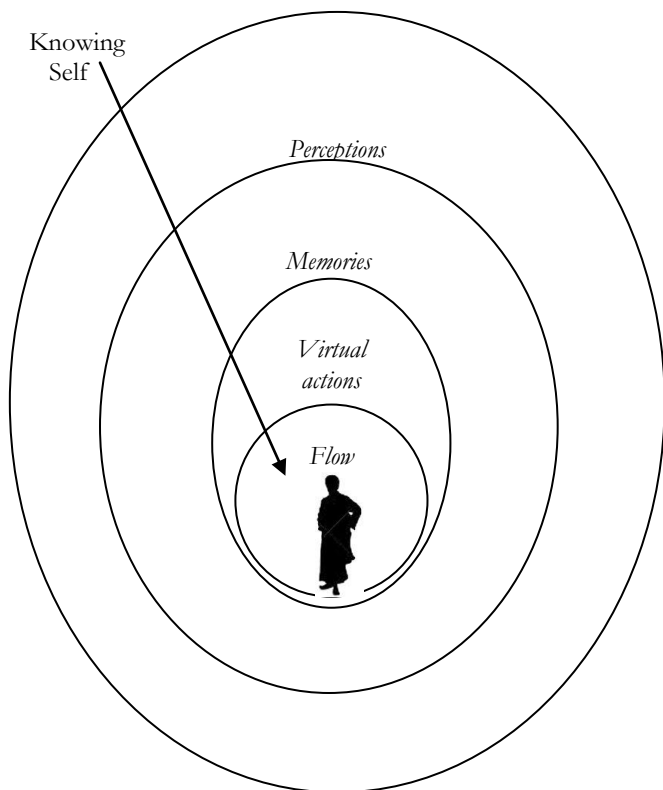
Intuition is what provides us our sense of our self as something alive, continuous, and enduring, a self always in process. Our own self, as an object, is at least the one object with which we can sympathize. He depicts our knowing of the self as a process by which we attend progressively from the more outer (perceptions of objects outside ourselves) through memories (which

⁷⁶⁵ Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics* [French ed., 180] (Hulme, 5–6).

⁷⁶⁶ Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics* [French ed., 181] (Hulme, 6): *Nous appelons ici intuition la sympathie par laquelle on se transporte à l'intérieur d'un objet pour coïncider avec ce qu'il a d'unique et par conséquent d'inexprimable.*

⁷⁶⁷ Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics* [French ed., 181–82] (Hulme, 6–7). It is easy to see how different this position is from the Logical Positivists considered in the last chapter.

preserve and interpret perceptions), toward a store of habits and tendencies (a host of “virtual actions” (*d’actions virtuelles*)) attached to memories and perceptions, until at the center of the self is encountered a “continuity of flow” (*une continuité d’écoulement*).⁷⁶⁸ We can picture it this way:



⁷⁶⁸ Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics* [French ed., 182–83] (Hulme, 8–10).

Bergson invites us to envision this ceaseless “flow” or “flux” as like, on the one hand, the unraveling of a coil, and on the other hand, like the rolling up of a ball of string. But both those images, he continues, are misleading in suggesting something linear with similar parts that can be placed upon one another. Better, he says, is to imagine a spectrum of a thousand shades so that as one moves along the spectrum the gradual progression of tints is such that each sums up the one preceding it and announces the one following it. Yet even that image is misleading, too, in that it suggests each shade remains separate from the others. Instead, he urges, imagine something infinitely small and flexible, contracted to a single mathematical point then continuously lengthened from that point—but focus on the lengthening, not the line, or to put it differently, on the single, continuous action being shown. Even this metaphor, he concludes, is insufficient to fully capture the notion of *duration*.⁷⁶⁹

Duration

Intuition is the means by which we apprehend *duration*, the constant becoming that is the essence of reality and which produces a dependable knowing that is both dynamic and continuous. But these qualities mean that as soon as we try to speak of them we have distanced ourselves from them and reduced their reality. He argues that our own duration can be presented directly to us through intuition and, further, that we can suggest it through images (such as we saw above), but *concepts* can never suffice. Sciences like psychology depend on anal-

⁷⁶⁹ Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics* [French ed., 183–85] (Hulme, 10–13).

ysis and utilize conceptions. Philosophers, he argues, get themselves into trouble when they try to do the same—and this fault applies to empiricists and rationalists alike.⁷⁷⁰

Duration is the principal topic about which Bergson is interested in when he talks about intuition—the philosophical substance that is the object of intuition as a way of knowing.⁷⁷¹ In another place he writes:

The intuition we are talking about is therefore primarily about inner duration. It grasps a succession that is not juxtaposition, a growth from within, the uninterrupted prolongation of the past in a present that hinges on the future. It is the direct vision of the mind through the mind. Nothing more is interposed; there is no point of refraction through a prism of which one side is space and the other is language. Instead of states contiguous to states, which will become words juxtaposed with words, here is the indivisible, and hence the substantial, continuity of the flow of the interior life.

He then immediately caps his remarks with this statement: “Intuition, therefore, first means consciousness, but immediate consciousness, a vision that is hardly distinguishable from the object seen, knowledge that is contact and even coincidence.”⁷⁷²

⁷⁷⁰ Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics* [French ed., 185–93] (Hulme, 13–26). Moore, “Bergson and Pragmatism,” 413, notes, “In making intuition the method of philosophy, it is one of Bergson’s cherished convictions that he is ‘saving’ philosophy from the dogmatism of the realist on one side, and the transcendentalism of the idealist on the other.”

⁷⁷¹ See Hausheer, “Bergson,” 37, who calls duration the vital center of Bergson’s teaching.

⁷⁷² Bergson, *Creative Mind* (*La pensée et le mouvant*), Introduction, II [French ed., 27] (Andison, 20). (1st quote): *L’intuition dont nous parlons*

Intuition is hard to sustain. Bergson notes the distance between the simplicity of the direct knowing that happens in intuition and the complex explanations that thereafter try vainly to recapture it. He argues that in its clearest manifestation intuition *forbids*—it decisively says ‘No’ to some proposition previously accepted but now revealed as false. This primary intuition may yield later to the application of reason to explain it or to develop from it some new affirmation, but this original intuition is the most personal.⁷⁷³

Intuition & Reason

Bergson parts company with Kant’s idea that intuition requires us to take leave of our senses and consciousness. For Bergson, intuition is, in a sense, an ultimate form of empiricism. Bergson’s conception of intuition in relation to reason is one that has occasioned some debate.⁷⁷⁴ The charge that he is anti-reason is too strong, but he does displace reason from primacy in human knowing. He writes that, “Reason feels less comfortable in a world where it no longer finds, as in a

porte donc avant tout sur la durée intérieure. Elle saisit une succession qui n’est pas juxtaposition, une croissance par le dedans, le prolongement ininterrompu du passé dans un présent qui em-piète sur l’avenir. C’est la vision directe de l’esprit par l’esprit. Plus rien d’interposé; point de réfraction à travers le prisme dont une face est espace et dont l’autre est langage. (2nd quote): Intuition signifie donc d’abord conscience, mais conscience immédiate, vision qui se distingue à peine de l’objet vu, connaissance qui est contact et même coïncidence.

⁷⁷³ Bergson, *Creative Mind*, Philosophical Intuition [French ed., 117–52] (Andison, 87–106).

⁷⁷⁴ Hausheer, “Bergson,” 38. See Spinoza, *On the Improvement of the Understanding* (*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*). For a contrary view, see Lossky, “Defects of Bergson’s Epistemology.”

mirror, its own image.”⁷⁷⁵ But if reason is diminished, the whole person is enhanced.

Intuition & Mysticism

As is perhaps obvious from what we already have seen, Bergson links intuition to mysticism. In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (*Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion*) he argues that mysticism, as an original experience, is independent of religious tradition and theology. As a dynamic experience it has to remain free of creed and dogma. It also must impel the person to action; true mystical experience is never merely passive reflection.⁷⁷⁶ The kind of knowing God that is purported in mysticism is not a result of logical reasoning or sense experience (at least in the way empiricism has in mind), but a *direct and immediate, holistic apprehension*.

Bergson & Pragmatism

From very early on Bergson’s epistemology has been discussed in conjunction with Pragmatism. Any indebtedness, though, is mostly on the side of William James, who is clearly influenced by Bergson. The warm feeling is reciprocated by Bergson toward James, with whom he met three times and whose position as articulated in his 1908 Hibbert Lectures (the sixth of which focuses on Bergson), Bergson regards as close enough to his own that an attack on James can be construed as an assault on himself. But John Dewey, at the time of Bergson’s visit to Columbia University, publishes an

⁷⁷⁵ Bergson, *Creative Mind*, On the Pragmatism of William James (*Sur le pragmatisme de William James*) [French ed., 241–42] (Andison, 179). *Elle se sent moins à son aise dans un monde où elle ne retrouve plus, comme dans un miroir, sa propre image.*

⁷⁷⁶ See Bergson, *Two Sources*.

article making clear he does not regard Bergson as advancing a view congenial with the pragmatic method.⁷⁷⁷

Bergson clearly admires James, and while he notes he could raise objections to this and that in James' theory, he is generally positive about it. In a paper written after James' death, Bergson makes a keen observation—emphasized by his own use of italics—that one could summarize James' conception of truth by the following formula: “*while for other doctrines a new truth is a discovery, for pragmatism it is an invention.*”⁷⁷⁸

At the time Bergson visits the States in 1913, the popular press equates ‘Bergsonianism’ with the Pragmatism of James.⁷⁷⁹ Despite this widespread perception among the masses, within philosophical circles the assessment varies considerably. There are those who, disliking both Pragmatism and Bergson, casually lump them together for the sake of damning them in common.⁷⁸⁰ More sympathetically, noting the similarities

⁷⁷⁷ McGrath, “Bergson Comes to America,” 610–12. Among the places Bergson spoke were Columbia, Princeton, and Harvard.

⁷⁷⁸ Bergson, *Creative Mind*, On the Pragmatism of William James [French ed., 247] (Andison, 185): *tandis que pour les autres doctrines une vérité nouvelle est une découverte, pour le pragmatisme c'est une invention.*

⁷⁷⁹ McGrath, “Bergson Comes to America,” 607, reporting the article “A Philosopher of the Modern Spirit,” in *The Evening Post* of February 4, 1913. Also see Quirk, “Bergson in America.” Bergson's lectures at Columbia were summarized at the time by W. T. Bush, “The Bergson Lectures.”

⁷⁸⁰ Dolson, “Philosophy of Henri Bergson, II,” in 1911, opens his essay by remarking, “That Bergson is a pragmatist is an assumption that has been made both by the pragmatists themselves and by their opponents.” As we've seen, in 1913 Dewey forcefully rejects such an identification, but Dolson is correct that some pragmatists do include Bergson (see next footnote).

and differences, Bergson is sometimes grouped with the Pragmatists.⁷⁸¹

More commonly, though, despite apparent points of contact and similarity—and not withstanding James' own warm embrace of him—Bergson is not seen among his peers as a pragmatist. One, in 1911, says Bergson “appears in the anomalous position of protagonist of a philosophical standpoint which he only partially shares”—a fair enough assessment of a complicated reality in which the friendship between Bergson and James led each to emphasis more their points of contact than their differences.⁷⁸²

If anything, as time has passed, Bergson's distance from Pragmatism has seemed more and more to be emphasized. One early 21st century writer, arguing that Bergson opposes Pragmatism, boldly declares, “The opposite of intuitive knowledge is pragmatic knowledge.”⁷⁸³ Another goes so far as to argue that Bergson, rather than being a pragmatist, is actually a kind of positivist!⁷⁸⁴ Such varied assessments reflect a situation with Bergson of a complicated and subtle position susceptible to various interpretations.

⁷⁸¹ Macintosh, *Problem of Knowledge*, 416 (cf. 453–54) presents Bergson as a representative of “quasi-pragmatism.” Cf. Kallen, *William James and Henri Bergson* for a much more complete assessment.

⁷⁸² Dolson, “Philosophy of Henri Bergson, II,” 46. Cf. Moore, “Bergson and Pragmatism,” 397, who comments, “The doctrines of Bergson's philosophy which are commonly supposed to contain its chief points of contact with pragmatism are: first, its instrumental theory of Knowledge; second, its anti-intellectualism which is a corollary of the instrumentalism; third, its evolutionism.” He goes on to argue that the differences are more substantial.

⁷⁸³ Allen, “The Use of Useless Knowledge,” 50.

⁷⁸⁴ Gunter, “The Dialectic of Intuition.”

Chapter 17

Polanyi's 'Tacit Knowing

Michael Polanyi (1891–1976), who came to philosophy in the mid-1960s after distinguishing himself as a scientist of physical chemistry, actually was making contributions to the philosophy of science decades earlier, even though they did not become apparent until later. In the 1930s, as European scientists wrestled with how to meet the economic and political challenges of the time, Polanyi the chemist was in the front ranks of the cultural debates going on. Based on his experiences, Polanyi increasingly came to see the social and cultural forces at work in science. His writings anticipate the more formal emergence in the late 1960s–early 1970s of a social epistemology of science, a change most forcibly announced a little earlier in the *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, by Thomas Kuhn (1922–1996), who warmly nods in Polanyi's direction for his most seminal insight into the nature of knowledge.⁷⁸⁵

As this opening remark suggests, Polanyi forges his conception of knowledge in a context of analyzing and contesting certain facets of scientific knowing that had been long ignored. He desires to attend to the *human element in science*. In his effort to reveal the nature of science and reform it he turns to philosophy.

⁷⁸⁵ On Polanyi's role in this historical development, see Nye, *Micabel Polanyi*. Kuhn mentions Polanyi in an important footnot on p. 44 and calls attention to him again on p. 190.

Basic Conception of Knowledge

In the early 1960s Polanyi sets out a model of knowing and knowledge that seeks to incorporate elements old and new. Drawing on Martin Buber's (1878–1965) distinction between 'I-Thou' and 'I-It' relationships—i.e., between personal Subject-to-Subject relationships and impersonal Subject-to-Object ones—Polanyi argues the modern science tends to replace I-Thou with I-It, resulting in a distortion of the truth. To correct this, he says, requires restoring to our conception of knowledge elements deleted by modern positivistic science.⁷⁸⁶

The root of the solution lies in no longer denying or ignoring the fact that there are two kinds of knowledge. The side championed by science is the knowledge of empirical particulars gained by attending to something. Alongside it, and typically left unrecognized, is a holistic knowing—"a knowing by relying on our awareness of the many particulars of the entity in the act of attending to it." These two kinds of knowing are two kinds of *attention*. The Knower shifts between them, unable to do both at the same time.⁷⁸⁷

Polanyi associates with the holistic attention the faculty of understanding and argues that the idea of comprehensive entities—and not merely their particular parts—is what positivist science has discarded. Polanyi contests such a decision and bluntly declares, "What is not understood cannot be said to be known."⁷⁸⁸

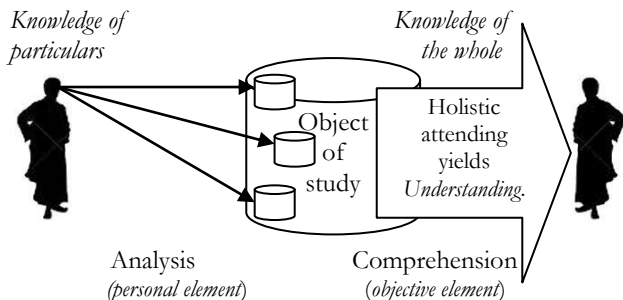
⁷⁸⁶ Polanyi, "The Scientific Revolution," 331–32.

⁷⁸⁷ Polanyi, "The Scientific Revolution," 332–33. He points to the research of Gestalt Psychology as illustrative and says that what holds true for perception holds at every level of knowing.

⁷⁸⁸ Polanyi, "The Scientific Revolution," 333.

Our initial illustration thus presents the following:

Two Kinds of ‘Attending’ to an Object

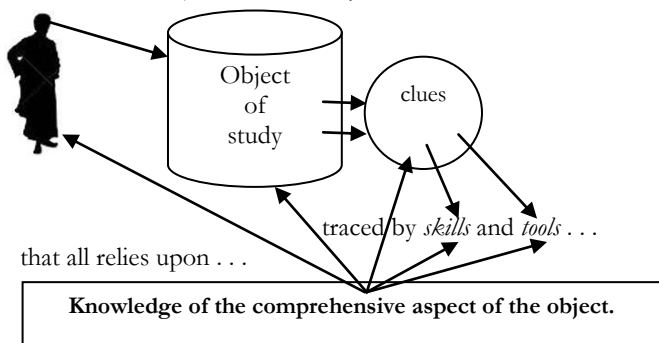


Within this basic framework Polanyi next turns his attention to detailing the nature of comprehension.

Understanding-Comprehension

Comprehension, Polanyi says, involves knowing by attending to *the whole set of particulars* and it involves testing by examination of the object for clues.⁷⁸⁹

Examination of object . . . yields clues . . .



⁷⁸⁹ Polanyi, “The Scientific Revolution,” 334–35 (also see 339). Also see Polanyi, “Knowing and Being.”

Perception serves as a foundational building block in Polanyi's epistemology. In a 1966 article entitled "The Logic of Tacit Inference," he reports that since beginning his epistemological work some two decades earlier, his basic assumption has been that perception provides the logic by which tacit powers in knowing can achieve true conclusions.⁷⁹⁰

He notes being greatly impressed by the research carried out in Gestalt Psychology. He likens the integration achieved by human eyesight of "a thousand changing particulars into a single constant sight" to what transpires—albeit with more training and effort—in scientific discovery. He highlights the role played by perceptual clues the person is not consciously attending to in the perceived appearance of an object. These clues are of two kinds:

1. *Subliminal* clues below awareness;
2. *Marginal* clues readily available to consciousness if desired.

Together these clues, though indirect, contribute to the perception though they are subsidiary to one's focal awareness.⁷⁹¹

The *focal* and *subsidiary* kinds of awareness in perception both contribute to the "tacit apprehension of coherence." In other words, by adding in both together one perceives an object differently than if only focal awareness of particular features is present. This act of integration, one producing a holistic perception, is what

⁷⁹⁰ Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference," 1.

⁷⁹¹ Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference," 2–3.

Polanyi terms “tacit knowing”—a matter to which we now must devote our attention.⁷⁹²

Tacit Knowing

Polanyi proposes a model of tacit knowing as *inexpressible but real knowing*. Such knowing has the following characteristics:

1. *Personal*: the *knower* can never be separated from the *knowing*. In fact, we do well to remember that all knowing is grounded in one’s body.
2. *Intentional*: knowing is directed toward discovery and meaning-making, toward relating ourselves to reality; ‘universal intent’ expresses our confidence that others can and do share an anticipatory grasp—a vision—of knowledge yet to be discovered.
3. *Only partly accessible*: obviously some of what we know we can share with others. But there remains knowledge that speech is insufficient to convey.

Tacit knowing is implicit but consequential because it is both intentional and a central aspect of human cognition. Polanyi’s philosophy of knowing points out a simple but profound truth: “*we know more than we can tell.*” But what we cannot tell is still known and informs all that we can tell. It does more, too; it guides our search for knowledge.⁷⁹³ Put another way, Polanyi em-

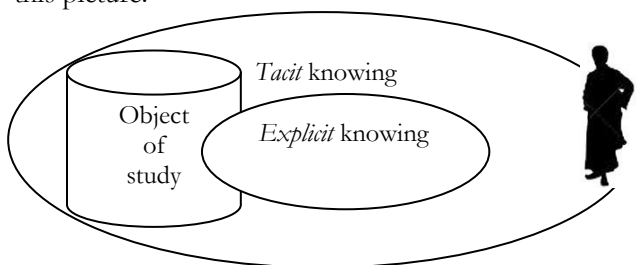
⁷⁹² Polanyi, “The Logic of Tacit Inference,” 1.

⁷⁹³ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 4.

phasizes that “our *explicit knowledge of a thing invariably relies on our tacit awareness of some other things.*”⁷⁹⁴

Tacit Knowing vs. Explicit Knowing

While Polanyi is most famous for his ideas about tacit knowing, he is careful not to forget *explicit knowing*. Indeed, he thinks these two are not sharply separated. Using what he says about their relationship we have this picture:



There can be tacit knowing without explicit knowing, but not the other way around; as Polanyi puts it, all explicit knowing is rooted in tacit knowing.⁷⁹⁵

Tacit integration is a faster process than occurs with the integration in explicit knowing. Polanyi says this is why *intuitive leaps of insight* reach integrations with blinding speed.⁷⁹⁶

Polanyi contends that the way the body is involved in perception provides a model for all forms of knowledge and thinking. He points out it is the body alone that affords us the only assembly of particulars known by us almost exclusively through its reliance on that assembly to attend to other things. Making sense of the

⁷⁹⁴ Polanyi, "Science and Religion," 5.

⁷⁹⁵ Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference," 7.

⁷⁹⁶ Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference," 7.

world inevitably entails relying on our tacit knowledge of both the impacts our bodies make on the world and the impact the world makes on our bodies.⁷⁹⁷

I-Me' Relation & Indwelling

“Clearly,” Polanyi writes, “the new element I have introduced here into the conception of knowing is the knowing of things by relying on our awareness of them for attending to something else that comprehends them.” There is, in other words, a *knowing of something by attending to something else*. He offers as an example the experience of living in one’s body. We use the body as a tool to observe and manipulate other objects; in this manner we come to know our own body as we attend consciously to objects outside it. This kind of relation, he concludes, is neither ‘I-Thou’ nor ‘I-It,’ but ‘I-Me.’⁷⁹⁸

In the same way we learn about our body by using it while attending to other things, we extend our knowledge of other things, too, in using them while attending to yet other objects. In this manner, Polanyi asserts, we both modify and enlarge our intellectual being. He says we can look at this process either as one of assimilating things into ourselves or as we pouring ourselves into those things. This is a process of *learning* and yet one that, curiously enough, seems not to have been included in earlier theories of knowledge. Polanyi terms this *knowledge by indwelling*.⁷⁹⁹

An example of such is when one learns to use a language or tool with the same kind of awareness one

⁷⁹⁷ Polanyi, “The Logic of Tacit Inference,” 10.

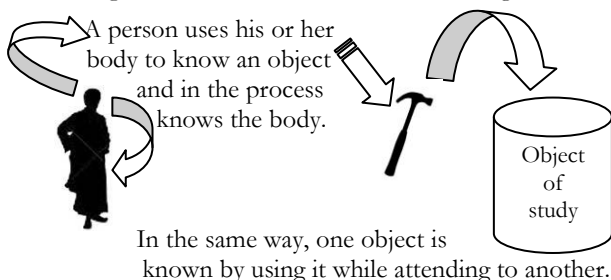
⁷⁹⁸ Polanyi, “The Scientific Revolution,” 336. Also, “Faith and Reason,” 241.

⁷⁹⁹ Polanyi, “The Scientific Revolution,” 336–37.

has of her or his body; the person *interiorizes* such things and, in effect, dwells in them not unlike one dwells in his or her body. This process extends ourselves into the world and facilitates the development of new faculties. It is the very process of learning, whether mastering one's culture or mastering things at school. By such interiorization meaning is bestowed.⁸⁰⁰

We can picture this matter as follows:

Indwelling: how we extend ourselves in knowing the world



Polanyi extends this logic further. As mentioned a moment ago, just as we rely on our body to know things outside it, we rely on things to know other things. He argues that as we attend *from* a set of particulars *to* the whole of which they are part we establish a *logical relation of parts to whole*. Thereby there can be an “act of comprehending a whole *as an interiorization of its parts*.” That means, just as we indwell the tools we use we also indwell the particulars we comprehend.⁸⁰¹

Polanyi wishes it to be clear that he is not merely announcing some kind of formal logic. The kind of indwelling he is talking about is a *feeling participation* in

⁸⁰⁰ Polanyi, “The Logic of Tacit Inference,” 10–11.

⁸⁰¹ Polanyi, “The Logic of Tacit Inference,” 11.

what we understand. Feelings of comprehension can increase in depth from 'I-It' to 'I-Thou' relations. Indwelling itself becomes deeper as one proceeds from broad knowledge (e.g., the conception of a species) to particular subjects (e.g., living individuals). In fact, the integration involved in knowing the latter is guided by the active functions of the living entity itself.⁸⁰²

These considerations lead us to another important aspect of knowing. *Looking at* and *attending from* an object leads to comprehending things like the structure and function of it.⁸⁰³ But there is another movement we need to give special attention to, the 'from-to' movement mentioned a moment ago.

'From-to' Directedness

Tacit knowing has what Polanyi calls a 'from-to' structure: our attention moves *from* particulars *to* the whole in such a manner that in attending to the whole we possess tacit knowledge of the particulars.

This structure shows that all thought contains components of which we are subsidiarily aware in the focal content of our thinking, and that all thought dwells in its subsidiaries, as if they were parts of our body.⁸⁰⁴

Perception again affords a prime example of 'from-to' directedness. The individual attends to a large number of clues from sources both external and internal (i.e., from outside and inside the body) and *from* these clues is directed *to* meaning.⁸⁰⁵

⁸⁰² Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference," 11–14.

⁸⁰³ Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference," 15–17.

⁸⁰⁴ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, xviii.

⁸⁰⁵ Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference," 9.

This 'from-to' structure leads to an idea of *intentionality* (not to be confused with the common meaning of that term), a *directedness* in knowing; all knowing is *about* something. The concept of intention means that knowing is directed and purposeful. A Knower directs attention to knowing reality—things as they really are. A Knower expects such knowing to be meaningful. A Knower anticipates discovery and believes this can be shared. In knowing, the particulars yielded by data foreshadow a possible solution to a problem subsequently encountered. The particulars from which we attend are directed to that problem even though we only know this tacitly when we first approach the problem.

Polanyi speaks of a *universal intent*, which can be described in the context of science:

A scientist, having relied throughout his inquiry on the presence of something real, hidden out there, can rely only on that external presence also for claiming the validity of the result that satisfies his quest. As he accepted the discipline which the external pole of his endeavor imposed on him throughout his inquiry, he expects that others—if similarly equipped—will also recognize and accept the discipline of the presence that guided him. By his own command, which bound him to the quest of reality, he will claim that his results are universally valid. Such is the universal intent of a scientific discovery.⁸⁰⁶

⁸⁰⁶ Polanyi and Prosch, *Meaning*, 194–95.

As the above remarks show, the nature of knowledge is deeply personal. What this means for Polanyi is that the knowing person is a thorough participant in the act of knowing. We cannot divorce the *Knower* from *knowing*, or as Polanyi puts it, *the dynamics of knowing* constitute *the dominant principle of knowledge*.⁸⁰⁷ The more formal articulation of knowing we find, for example, in science is never completely free from the tacit knowing we cannot articulate. Pure objectivity is impossible, but more than that it is undesirable and unrealistic. The subjectivity of the Knower's involvement in the act of knowing matters. What we *can* say is never divorced from what we *can't* say ('inarticulate intelligence'). But we must reckon with the latter. Therefore, "To affirm any thing," Polanyi says, "implies, then, to this extent an appraisal of our own art of knowing, and the establishment of truth becomes decisively dependent on a set of personal criteria of our own which cannot be formally defined."⁸⁰⁸

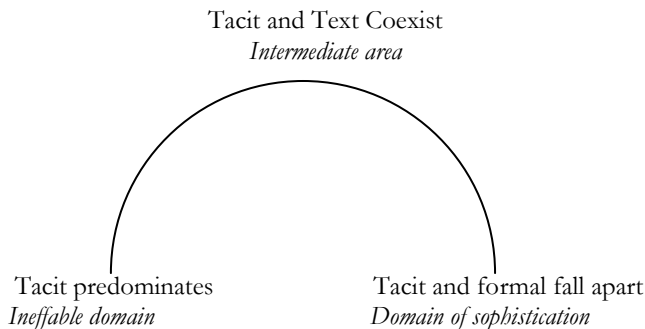
Tacit Knowing & Language

Just as we can't separate Knower from knowing, we cannot entirely separate thought from speech. Our knowing is expressed by language. The relation between thought and speech upon examination reveals three characteristic areas to Polanyi. These might be conceived along a spectrum where at either end are extremes and between them an intermediary, balanced area.

⁸⁰⁷ Polanyi, "Faith and Reason," 244.

⁸⁰⁸ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 72.

This can be pictured thusly:



The ineffable domain is one where tacit knowing is so pervasive that the result is one is rendered virtually mute. At the opposite extreme, the domain of sophistication, there can be two widely varying situations of how the tacit and formal articulation fall apart. On the one hand, there may be ineptitude of speech such that tacit thinking is encumbered. On the other hand, the symbolic operations of our articulation may actually outpace our understanding. Both these situations result in a state of mental uneasiness because we feel this disagreement between our tacit thoughts and our symbolic operations; we are forced to choose to move one way or another. In the intermediate area articulation occurs that is easily understood and which conveys the tacit component in its meaning.⁸⁰⁹

Taken together, the personal nature of knowing and the limitations of human articulation mean we cannot expect purely objective thinking and speaking anywhere—including science. What is true of science is true of religion: both are systems of belief that give

⁸⁰⁹ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 90–97.

meaning and direction to their adherents. Both rely on knowledge that is rooted in tacit knowing.

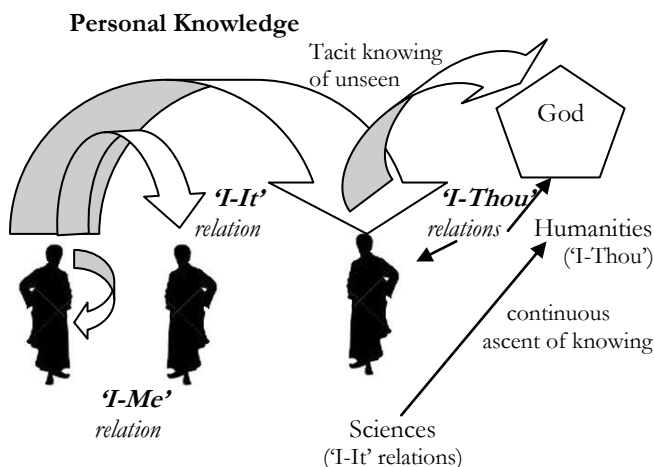
The Conflict between Faith & Reason

Much of Polanyi's philosophical work engages him in the conflict he finds in science between faith and reason. Indeed, his interest in this relationship dates back, by his own reckoning, to his 1946 book *Science, Faith and Society*. In a later article entitled "The Scientific Revolution," he writes that he has come to see that the modern conflict in science is merely the latest iteration in a series dating back to the dawn of philosophic speculation.⁸¹⁰

In an article entitled "Faith and Reason" in the *Journal of Religion* he expresses his hope that a balance between belief and reason will eventually form along lines similar to those Augustine marked out, the approach of faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*). Above we saw that Polanyi spoke of how we affirm our own knowing. He argues that however we regard the origin of our confidence in our own thinking it is always a hopeful act like that found in all expressions of faith. *Knowing and believing are inseparable*; the latter leads to the former. Thus, the apprehension of what is hidden requires an act of faith in our own intimations—our tacit knowing—of the unseen. This entails hazard—all knowing is a kind of leap of faith into the unknown—but it is an essential part of knowing to retain an element of uncertainty. In Polanyi's estimation, his way of knowing leads to an ascending hie-

⁸¹⁰ Polanyi, "The Scientific Revolution (1961/4)," 329.

rarchy of meaning whereby the supernatural can be known and so, too, God.⁸¹¹ It looks like this:



Knowing proceeds from less personal ‘I-It’ relations, such as in knowing an object of inanimate matter, to more personal ‘I-Thou’ relations in knowing other living beings. Through knowing comprehensive entities one discovers ascending levels of existence. Knowing viewed as “a dynamic force of comprehension,” says Polanyi, opens the way to knowing a universe constructed as “an ascending hierarchy of meaning,” and of knowing God.⁸¹²

Polanyi regards religious knowing as a universal capacity springing from a tacit act of comprehension that gives birth to faith. He notes the visibility of this in children, but contends that once acquired the skill of

⁸¹¹ Polanyi, “Faith and Reason,” 244–46; quoted excerpts, 246.

⁸¹² Polanyi, “Faith and Reason,” 245.

religious knowing is rarely lost. But this knowledge has its own peculiar character. Polanyi remarks:

While theological attempts to prove the existence of God are as absurd as philosophical attempts to prove the premises of mathematics or the principles of empirical inference, theology pursued as an axiomatization of the Christian faith has an important analytic task. Though its results can be understood only by practicing Christians, it can greatly help them to understand what they are practicing.⁸¹³

Polanyi argues that the way theology speaks about God is, within the frame of reference of observable experience, not subject to validation. It is, instead, an effort that seems filled with self-contradictions; but this is no less the case in contemporary physics. The paradoxes of Christianity have rationality in framing and stabilizing beliefs people employ to satisfy their own personal standards.⁸¹⁴

Polanyi gives substantial consideration to believing and belief. He distinguishes two forms of believing. One is the explicit profession of articles of faith as found, for example, in ecumenical creeds. This way of believing is what we earlier termed creedalism. Such believing has been subjected since the Enlightenment and the rise of science to significant shaking of its stability by the systematic application of doubt. The other, Polanyi says, "is held implicitly by reliance on a particular conceptual framework by which all experience is interpreted." This is the form of believing that most interests Polanyi. Science itself is this kind of believ-

⁸¹³ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 297.

⁸¹⁴ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 297–99.

ing—a shared belief which provides an interpretive framework that claims a hold on the minds of its adherents despite the fact that its basic propositions about such matters as discovery, verification and falsification are all formed along lines resistant to final proof or disproof and applied by personal judgment accredited by the person believing them.⁸¹⁵ The very doubting that is applied to creedal believing tends not to be applied to the believing we each engage in to form our own interpretive framework.

Polanyi also offers an interesting perspective on *doubt*. In his view, all doubting is in a manner also an expression of belief. He writes, “the doubting of any explicit statement merely implies an attempt to deny the belief expressed by the statement, in favour of other beliefs which are not doubted for the time being.”⁸¹⁶ In this manner, believing rises to an exalted position as the wellspring of knowing—an idea we examined in our earlier chapter on the relation of believing to knowing.

Concluding Comment

Polanyi clearly sees himself as a reformer of epistemology and the philosophy of science.⁸¹⁷ He is well aware, too, of the ways in which his own theory of knowledge comes close to or varies from other epistemologies.⁸¹⁸

⁸¹⁵ Polanyi, “The Stability of Beliefs,” 217. Cf. Polanyi, “Scientific Beliefs.” On the relation to science, see especially Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society*.

⁸¹⁶ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 286.

⁸¹⁷ Polanyi and Prosch, *Meaning*, Preface (by Prosch), x. Jha, *Reconsidering*, vii, remarks of Polanyi, “He conceived his philosophy as an antireductionist, antipositivist effort.”

⁸¹⁸ Polanyi, “The Logic of Tacit Inference,” 17.

Chapter 18

Where Are We Now?

Whose is the next important voice to be attended to on the subject of knowledge? Surely we have not, after a mere 2500 years of discussion, exhausted the matter! It is only right to conclude this volume by some examination of what is going on in epistemology at the present.

Of course, we all suffer historical myopia, an inability to see clearly what may be right in front of us that subsequent generations will judge important. Fads rise and fall away—and may obscure what in hindsight were more consequential endeavors. As we are in the thick of things happening we cannot with great clarity state what will endure.

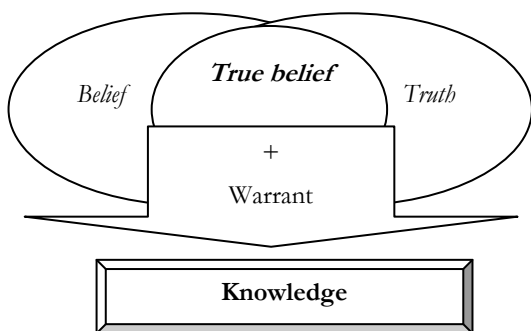
But we can identify a few matters that have greatly occupied thinking about knowledge over the last half century or so and continue to matter. To get at the first of these we must recall that across the long discussion about knowledge we have been eavesdropping on philosophers have developed a three-fold manner of distinguishing talk about knowledge. These are:

1. knowing *that* (propositional knowledge);
2. knowing *how* (procedural knowledge, or knowledge of technique); and,
3. knowing *what* or *whom* (objectual knowledge).

As we have seen, in epistemology the first of these gains the most attention. Knowledge, in this sense, is

about asserting something to be true. The bulk of our discussion has been about propositional knowledge (knowing *that*). Propositions are in the form of statements, especially assertions with reference to truth, as in “*That* is a cow.” Such assertions intend truth with the truth being about some reality, what actually *is*. Of course, there is much more to the matter than this, but this shall suffice for reminding us that in all the debates about *how* we know, and *how much*, the most fundamental and persistent intention of epistemology has been to connect knowledge with reality—i.e., epistemology with metaphysics—such that truth is displayed.

A common way to do this has been to slightly adjust the above presentation to say that the goal has been to bring belief and truth together in such a fashion that knowledge is established. The popular notion that *knowledge is true, justified belief*, exemplifies this. It can be pictured as follows:



Knowledge exists where belief and truth overlap, with evidence providing justification or warrant for the truthfulness of the belief (i.e., it isn't a true belief by accident or coincidence).

Gettier Problem

The above view is sharply challenged a bit past the midpoint of the 20th century. Edmund Gettier (1927–), in a short paper, revolutionizes epistemology in 1963, the ‘Year of Gettier’: “It was the year when he *changed* epistemology, from then until at least now.”⁸¹⁹ Still, in retrospect it is hard to justify the belief that what Gettier accomplished was a Kuhnian revolution in overthrowing a dominant epistemological paradigm.

As philosopher Pierre La Morven points out, it has become since Gettier commonplace to claim the ‘justified true belief’ position as being the so-called ‘traditional’ conception of knowledge, allegedly first finding expression in Plato (where in this book we earlier considered it). But its actual roots are ambiguous. Likely its first clear expression is in C. I. Lewis’ (1883–1964) 1946 volume *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, though there are other expressions that can plausibly be seen as setting forth this position. Surveys of epistemology and its history that are contemporaneous to Gettier do not represent the position as dominant or even particularly noteworthy.⁸²⁰

So what does Gettier do that is so remarkable? Perhaps we might better see his accomplishment as energizing a new, if narrow line of inquiry. In so doing it became convenient to justify all the attention given to the Gettier problem as warranted because Gettier had successfully slain some epistemological dragon.

⁸¹⁹ Hetherington, *Knowledge and the Gettier Problem*, 1.

⁸²⁰ See Le Morvan, “Knowledge Before Gettier.” Lewis, *Analysis*, 9, states, “Knowledge is belief which not only is true but is also justified in its believing attitude.”

Be that as it may, to understand his accomplishment we must continue thinking a little longer about the notion that knowledge is true, justified belief. Though both 'belief' and 'true' are indispensable elements, the key is 'justified.' One might have a true belief by accident, such as believing that one has exactly 37 cents in a coat pocket without having actually counted it. In short, a true belief can be a matter purely of *luck*. No one is likely to call such a circumstance 'knowledge.' It is the act of actually counting one's change that provides a point of information that substantiates a *warrant* for the belief's truthfulness. The belief is true without the warrant, but only with it does it become justified to term it 'knowledge.'

Understanding this point focuses the study of knowledge on the *information* that provides warrant and justifies calling a true belief 'knowledge.' Traditionally, philosophers adopting the notion of knowledge as true justified belief, when directing their attention to the information for justification, have focused on assessing its sufficiency, whether measured qualitatively ('Is it good enough?') or quantitatively ('Is it enough?'), and relevancy. But Gettier takes a different approach.

Gettier's paper in its title asks, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"⁸²¹ Rather than accept the presumption that it is, he tests it logically and finds it wanting. He establishes to the satisfaction of his peers that justified true belief is *not* sufficient to establish knowledge. He does this by illustrating that a belief can be both true *and justified* yet still fall short of being "knowledge."

⁸²¹ Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"

Gettier's procedure is to present two cases illustrative of two fundamental contentions. These are:

1. A person can be justified in believing a proposition that is, in fact, false (Fallibilism).
2. If a person is justified in believing a proposition, and that proposition entails some particular point deduced from the justified proposition, then it also is justified (Justification Closure).⁸²²

Gettier's paper is not quite three pages long, and most of it is taken up with two cases. Since his paper's appearance such so-called 'Gettier cases,' illustrating these ideas, have multiplied. We need provide only one to show their nature:

At 4:40 on a Wednesday afternoon Sam sees his friend Samantha some distance away emerge from a cab and enter a bank. Sam has the belief that Samantha will soon re-emerge from the bank because her work shift at a nearby store begins at 5 p.m. Sam's belief is true because Samantha does exit the bank at 4:50. His belief is also warranted because he knows Samantha's shift begins at 5 and he knows the store is just four blocks away. But Sam does not actually know it is Samantha that he has seen exiting, for another woman of similar build and identically dressed was also in the bank. In fact, this woman left the bank at the same time as Samantha, and it may well be it was this other woman whom Sam saw.

⁸²² Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" 121. The labels are not in Gettier's article. For them, see Borges, De Almeida, and Klein, *Explaining Knowledge*, 2.

Sam's evidence of [a] seeing Samantha enter the bank, [b] being aware of the time, [c] knowing of Samantha's shift start and location, and [d] seeing a woman of the same build and dress exit the bank in a timely fashion all constitute a body of information sufficient to justify his belief, which is in fact a true belief (Samantha did exist the bank in a timely fashion and made it to work on time). But despite the warrant and the true belief, Sam cannot have actual knowledge because his inference that the woman he saw leave was Samantha is objectively uncertain.⁸²³ Because he did not know another woman of similar build and identical dress was also present and left at the expected time, his conclusion is justified true belief—but not *knowledge*.

Classifying Gettier Cases

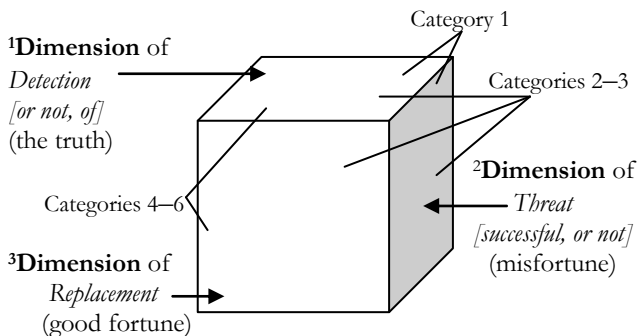
The problem with offering only one example, however, is that there have been so many Gettier cases brought forth, with varying salient features, that the result has been a recognition that not all cases are alike but, in fact, across their range they present some distinct elements important to the conversation. Any given Gettier case might be picked apart without the general problem being erased.

Therefore, a taxonomy has been proposed for Gettier cases by philosophers Peter Blouw, Wesley Buckwalter, and John Turri. Their taxonomy features three dimensions and six categories. The dimensions interact to form the categories.⁸²⁴

We can illustrate the basic structure as follows:

⁸²³ Sam's information may be *relevant*, but not actually *sufficient*.

⁸²⁴ Blouw, Buckwalter, and Turri, "Gettier Cases: A Taxonomy," 244–48.



Dimensions 1 and 2 interact in category 1, and together with dimension 3 interact in categories 2 and 3. Dimensions 1 and 2 interact in categories 4 through 6. Thus, the first dimension is foundational to all six categories. Dimensions 2 and 3 reflect the important role “luck” has in Gettier cases.⁸²⁵

We can use category 1 as an example of how this taxonomy works. A Gettier case belongs in category 1 if there is a detection of the truth accompanied by a pertinent, but failed threat. In our case example, Sam’s detection of the truth might have been threatened by the fact that he misread his watch, which actually reports the time as 3:40, not 4:40. Had he accurately read his watch he might not have formed the belief he did, but since he misread his watch this threat failed.

Categories 2 and 3 involve all three dimensions. In both categories the first two dimensions operate exactly the same: there is a detection of the truth and there is a

⁸²⁵ Or, ‘double luck’ structure; see Hazlett, “The Maturation of the Gettier Problem,” 3. On the nature of luck, its role in epistemology, and its relation to the Gettier problem, see Church, “Getting ‘Lucky’ with Gettier.”

successful threat. What varies lies in dimension 3. In that dimension some factor—similar or dissimilar to the factor that initially prompted the belief—occurs and serves as the replacement to the initial factor. The variance between categories 2 and 3 exists in that the former has a similar replacing factor and the latter a dissimilar one.

Categories 4 through 6 are all similar in entailing a *failure* to detect the truth. In our example, suppose the fact is that it was the other woman Sam saw leaving the bank. He then fails to detect the truth. The variance among the categories lies entirely in dimension 3. In category 4 there is a similar replacement, i.e., something is present similar to the undetected truth and the detection of it generates the true belief. In category 5 the same result obtains, but the replacement is dissimilar. Finally, in category 6 there is not only a failure to detect the truth, but nothing exists to render a judgment true.

Blouw, Buckwalter, and Turri argue that using this taxonomy clarifies the structure of any given Gettier case and thus, on one side, avoids terminological confusion in discussions, and on the other side, helps clarify why reported differences in research studies may exist.⁸²⁶

As for proposed solutions, the situation today shows a number of proposals. The editors of one volume note in their introduction, when it comes to the Gettier problem, “There seem to be more approaches to the problem than philosophers working on it.”⁸²⁷

⁸²⁶ Blouw, Buckwalter, and Turri, “Gettier Cases: A Taxonomy,” 248–49.

⁸²⁷ Borges, De Almeida, and Klein, *Explaining Knowledge*, 1.

By the end of the 20th century a degree of mythic reverence had settled around Gettier's problem. It became popularly cited as a rare instance of an actual philosophical 'proof.' Although it is impossible to state as fact, it takes little investigation of the research during that time to conclude that most philosophers were persuaded by Gettier.⁸²⁸

In the early 21st century, a growing divergence of approaches and reappraisals of the whole situation have emerged. These range from concluding that the Gettier problem is unsolvable to a myriad of proposed solutions. The application of the problem has also been extended beyond the question of propositional knowledge.⁸²⁹ What is most clear at present is that wrestling with the Gettier problem will continue for some time.

Discussion of Gettier cases and debate over how compelling his argument is have become a kind of cottage industry within philosophy that shows no sign of abating any time soon.⁸³⁰ Whether this situation ultimately proves itself to have been time well-spent remains to be seen; history will render its verdict. As in other professions there is in philosophy a tendency to produce self-justifying reasons for what is pursued and cling to them until they seem are indefensible.

⁸²⁸ Hazlett, "The Maturation of the Gettier Problem," 2, flatly declares, "For the most part, epistemologists agreed with Gettier's conclusion, and took it to represent an important insight into the nature of knowledge."

⁸²⁹ See Hazlett, "The Maturation of the Gettier Problem," 3–6.

⁸³⁰ See, for example, Borges, De Almeida, and Klein, *Explaining Knowledge*, or Hetherington, *The Gettier Problem*.

Jaakko Hintikka & Epistemic Logic

Although this volume has touched only lightly on logic it has been a continuing interest of epistemologists and significantly related to theories of knowledge. We have seen among the figures examined frequent appeals to ‘logic’ of one sort or another.

However, in the mid-20th century, about the same time as Gettier is publishing his paper, a Finnish philosopher-logician, Jaakko Hintikka (1929–2015) is preparing work that offers a fresh and important way to address issues central to any theory of knowledge. In 1962 appears Hintikka’s *Knowledge and Belief: An Introduction to the Logic of the Two Notions*. The term ‘logic’ in the title is with reference to ‘epistemic logic.’⁸³¹

In 1951, Georg Henrik von Wright (1916–2003) introduces the terms ‘epistemic logic’ (logic of knowledge [*episteme*]) and ‘doxastic logic’ (logic of belief [*doxa*]).⁸³² A decade later Hintikka makes this two notion model one that better grabs the attention of his colleagues. *Epistemic logic*, as the name suggests, aims at providing a logic to inform epistemological reasoning.⁸³³ *Doxastic logic* concerns how we reason about belief, including how we update and revise our beliefs.

⁸³¹ For an introduction to Hintikka, see Auxier and Hahn, *Philosophy of Jaakko Hintikka*.

⁸³² Von Wright, *An Essay in Modal Logic*.

⁸³³ Hendricks and Rendsvig, “Hintikka’s Knowledge and Belief in Flux,” 1, remark that, “Epistemic logic was to be assessed on its ability to inform and align epistemology—the logical exercises and insights were intended to say something about the rationality of inquiry and what it *means* to know, not what it *is* to know.” For Hintikka’s own reckoning of its central conceptual problems, see Hintikka and Hintikka, *The Logic of Epistemology*, 17–35.

Although Hintikka makes contributions with respect to studying the history of philosophy, the conduct of a philosophy of science, logic, and epistemology, here we will only sample a few matters in keeping with our own interests. Among the relevant matters we must leave to one side are his studies of the epistemologies of past philosophers.⁸³⁴

Knowledge & Belief (1962)

Hintikka's *Knowledge and Belief* is today recognized as effectively birthing modern epistemic logic. In his volume he begins by formulating, explaining, and defending rules of consistency ('defensibility') for various sentences involving statements using the verbs 'knows' and 'believes.' From there he applies what he has established to various problems, most famously G. E. Moore's paradox (so named by Wittgenstein).⁸³⁵

In broad strokes, Hintikka operates within a framework where he posits knowledge and belief have different logics. He understands that a word like 'knows' is used in many different senses, some weaker and others stronger. He is especially interested in the strong kind involving relevant and sufficient grounds to make themselves rationally defensible. So his task is to consider "how the properties of model sets are affected by the presence of the notions of knowledge and belief; how, in other words, the notion of a model set can be

⁸³⁴ See Hintikka, *Knowledge and the Known*. For an examination of three of these with respect to Plato, see Giovannetti, "Time, Knowledge and the Telos."

⁸³⁵ Hintikka, *Knowledge and Belief*, 64–102. Moore, "Moore's Paradox," 208, concerns statements such as "I don't believe it's raining, but as a matter of fact it is." Both parts can be true assertions.

generalized in such a way that the consistency (defensibility) of a set of statements remains tantamount to its capacity of being embedded in a model set.”⁸³⁶

The idea of defensibility is explained with logical notation, which Hintikka also puts into words: “If it is consistent of me to say that it is possible, for all I know, that q is the case, then it must be possible for q to turn out to be the case without invalidating any of my claims to knowledge; that is, there must not be anything inconsistent about a state of affairs in which q is true and in which I say I know.”⁸³⁷

As this makes plain, Hintikka is investigating claims made by people, in particular the kinds of statements reflecting an attitude of knowing or believing. He articulates an explicit modal logic⁸³⁸ with respect to ‘knowing that’ and ‘believing that.’ Statements of such a nature reflect either an epistemic attitude (e.g., “I know that ____”), or a doxastic one (e.g., “I believe that ____”). Both knowledge and belief are regarded as *propositional attitudes*—fundamental mental cognitive relationships toward what is expressed in statements. In logic these attitudes divide the set ‘all possible worlds’⁸³⁹ into two:

⁸³⁶ Hintikka, *Knowledge and Belief*, 34.

⁸³⁷ Hintikka, *Knowledge and Belief*, 17.

⁸³⁸ Modal logic concerns expressions of reasoning using ‘possibly’ and ‘necessarily’ (or similar terms, e.g., ‘permitted’ or ‘forbidden’).

⁸³⁹ Hintikka later came to regret the terminology ‘possible worlds,’ but he captures the sense in his 2003 essay “Second Generation Epistemic Logic,” 34: “In order to speak of what a certain person a knows and does not know, we have to assume a class (space) of possibilities. These possibilities will be called scenarios. Philosophers typically call them possible worlds.” One problem with the notion of possible worlds is its implication of logical omniscience. Niiniluoto, “Logical Tools,” 270, notes that, “To avoid the problem

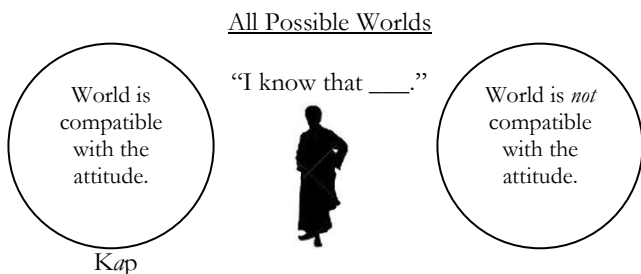
those where the world is compatible with the propositional attitude and those where it is not. Knowledge is truth among all accessible possible worlds.

Some key terms are as follows:

- agent (*a*);
- knows (K);
- believes (B);
- some proposition (*p*).

Thus in logical notation Bap means “in all possible worlds compatible with what the agent (*a*) believes, it is the case that *p*.” This is a more formal version of the form, “*a* believes that ____.”

We might picture things this way:



Of course, no one actually has recourse to all possible worlds. In reality, *the actual set of worlds accessible to a person depends on the information sources available at the time.*⁸⁴⁰ In that light, and against the background of a

of “logical omniscience”, i.e. that an agent knows all the logical consequences of her knowledge, Hintikka proposed the introduction of ‘impossible possible worlds’.”

⁸⁴⁰ Hintikka, *Knowledge and Belief*, 36, says of his results, “They are applicable to actual statements only insofar as our world approximates one of the ‘most knowledgeable of possible worlds’.”

semantics of all possible worlds, it is possible to evaluate assertions and propositional attitudes in a new way.

Hintikka argues that statements such as “I know that ____” are *committal* ones. He writes:

If somebody says “I know that p ” in this strong sense of knowledge, he implicitly denies that any further information would have led him to alter his view. He commits himself to the view that he would still persist in saying that he knows that p is true—or at the very least persist in saying that he knows that p is true—even if he knew more than he now knows.⁸⁴¹

Hintikka acknowledges that logic laws are not like natural laws. He observes, “Given a number of premises, logic does not tell us what conclusions we ought to draw from them; it merely tells us what conclusions we may draw from them—if we wish and if we are clever enough.”⁸⁴²

In all of this a particular goal exists:

The conditions into which we are trying to catch the logic of knowledge and belief are in terms of certain alternatives to a given state of affairs. Roughly speaking, these alternatives are possible states of affairs in which a certain person knows at least as much as—and usually even more than—he knows in the given state. In short, we are concerned with the different possibilities there are for somebody to gain further information⁸⁴³

⁸⁴¹ Hintikka, *Knowledge and Belief*, 18. A ‘strong sense’ of knowledge is one where conclusive evidentiary grounds exist for a proposition.

⁸⁴² Hintikka, *Knowledge and Belief*, 38.

⁸⁴³ Hintikka, *Knowledge and Belief*, 44.

It is to the gaining of further information—the turn from knowledge possession to knowledge acquisition—that we now must attend.

Ampliative Reasoning & Abduction

In a 1998 article Hintikka argues that the fundamental problem of contemporary epistemology is answering the question, ‘What is ampliative reasoning like?’ (Ampliative reasoning concerns inference, where an extension of knowledge occurs according to rules as a new conclusion is based on previous ones and adds knowledge.) Deductive logic as practiced by philosophers, says Hintikka, does not yield new knowledge.⁸⁴⁴

Inductive reasoning is likewise not the answer. Instead, Hintikka turns to the pragmatist Charles Peirce and the notion of *abduction*. This, Hintikka says, should not be understood as it often is as ‘an inference to the best explanation.’ Such an understanding he thinks is overly simplistic.⁸⁴⁵

Peirce, according to Hintikka, reasons out two kinds of rules for inference:

1. *definitory*—rules that provide move-by-move permissions in reasoning; and,
2. *strategic*—rules that have the aim of reasoning (i.e., acquiring truth) in view.

Utilizing Peirce’s thinking, Hintikka argues that “the idea of a strategic principle provides us with an Archimedean point by means of which we can identify the nature of abductive and in general ampliative reasoning.” That point of leverage is that in a rational ar-

⁸⁴⁴ Hintikka, “What Is Abduction?” 506.

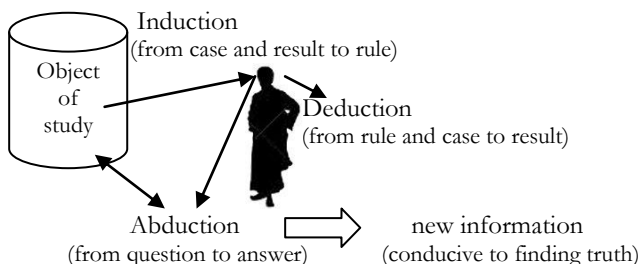
⁸⁴⁵ Hintikka, “What Is Abduction?” 506–11.

gument an ampliative step must be capable of being assessed strategically.⁸⁴⁶

In order to evaluate an ampliative step of reasoning four conditions must be met:

1. The *source* of new information must be known in order to assess *reliability*.
2. The source must have been *voluntarily chosen* from among known *alternatives*.
3. It must be known what results *could* have been yielded by the source without actually knowing what information *would be* provided.
4. It must also be known what results *could* have been provided by alternative sources.⁸⁴⁷

This produces Hintikka's own solution: abductive inferences are answers advancing knowledge by a process of placing questions—typically tacit in nature—to a source. This answer, he adds, is very similar to the Socratic method.⁸⁴⁸ It looks like this:



⁸⁴⁶ Hintikka, "What Is Abduction?" 512–17; the quote is from 517.

⁸⁴⁷ Hintikka, "What Is Abduction?" 517–18.

⁸⁴⁸ Hintikka, "What Is Abduction?" 519. He uses the analogy of a petitioner appearing before an oracle. He notes in "Intellectual Autobiography," 4, that he came to his interest in the Socratic method "at a relatively late stage of my philosophical career."

Abduction introduces new information into an argument. It is not, in his estimation, exactly the same as an inference, though it is like one. Abduction is a question-answer step that works alongside induction and deduction but plays a role and performs a function neither of those can meet. When it adds new information it typically does so in the form of an *hypothesis*, i.e., the new information cannot be assumed to be true. But it is conducive to acquiring truth (the strategic aim).⁸⁴⁹

Hintikka contends that his answer has direct and practical ramifications for epistemology and the philosophy of science. He offers as an example its utility in rendering the theory of scientific explanation as one of the study of logic of why-questions—an *interrogative model of inquiry*.⁸⁵⁰

Interrogative Model of Inquiry

In a 1992 essay, Hintikka begins by observing that the matter of knowledge acquisition remains underserved. He indicts a largely tacit belief that such a thing cannot be studied logically or epistemologically as the reason for the neglect. However, theories of knowledge-seeking by questioning such as his interrogative model reject such a belief and seek to develop explicit logical models about knowledge acquisition.⁸⁵¹

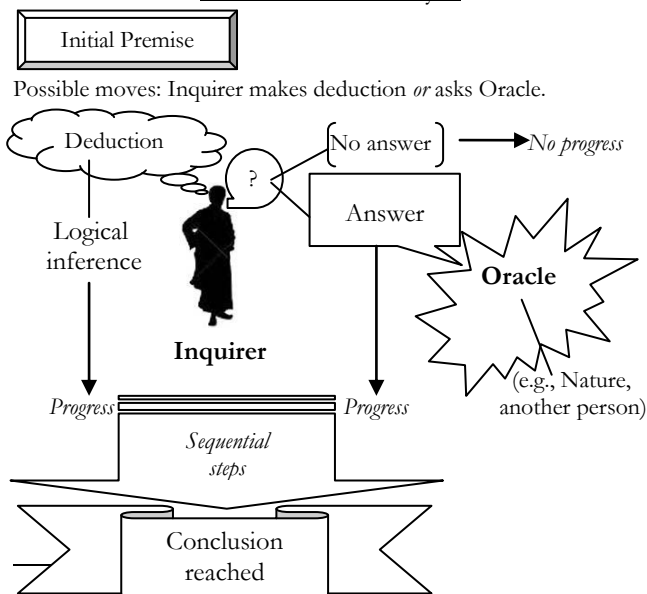
⁸⁴⁹ Hintikka, "What Is Abduction?" 519–31.

⁸⁵⁰ Hintikka, "What Is Abduction?" 519–22. He points to the elaboration of this in Hintikka, Halonen, and Mutanen, "Interrogative Logic."

⁸⁵¹ Hintikka, "Knowledge-Seeking by Questioning," 483, points by contrast to the neglect of attention to *knowledge* acquisition the long-standing interest of epistemologists in evaluating *beliefs* based on available evidence to determine their justification. In this vein, the notion of 'belief revision' has come to the fore in recent times.

As indicated a moment ago, Hintikka likens his model to a modern version of the Socratic method found in Plato's writings. He invites one to consider the model in its simplest form as a game in which there are two players, an *inquirer* (an individual or team) and an *oracle* (a source of information). The inquirer has as her or his goal the proving of a conclusion (C). The inquirer begins from a given initial premise (I). The inquirer 'plays' by making one of two moves: drawing a logical inference from the premise, or putting a question to the oracle. In the latter case, the oracle then provides an answer—or not. Answers provided are presumed true. As such happens, progress is made. The inquirer 'wins' the game if-and-only-if the goal is reached.⁸⁵²

How the Game Is Played



⁸⁵² Hintikka, "Knowledge-seeking by Questioning," 483–84.

The above ‘game’ has variations, such as changing the aim from proving a fixed conclusion to trying to answer a particular question, or changing the assumption that the Oracles answers are true to assuming they are false.⁸⁵³

Knowledge

Hintikka sees his contribution to understanding knowledge as resting in developing an epistemic logic for analyzing it. He does not claim to develop a new theory of knowledge but rather to be building on previous achievements so as to formulate a new outlook.⁸⁵⁴ Indeed, with respect to a theory of knowledge he seems to rely on well-established ideas. These include:

1. Knowledge entails *ampliative reasoning* (abduction).
2. Ampliative reasoning entails reliable and sufficient *information*.
3. Information entails acquisition by an inquirer through questioning *sources* (‘oracles’).
4. Such sources entail the goal of eliminating *uncertainty*.⁸⁵⁵
5. Eliminating uncertainty entails *defensibility*.
6. Defensibility entails *truth*.

⁸⁵³ Hintikka, “Knowledge-Seeking by Questioning,” 484

⁸⁵⁴ Hintikka, “Knowledge Acknowledged,” 251.

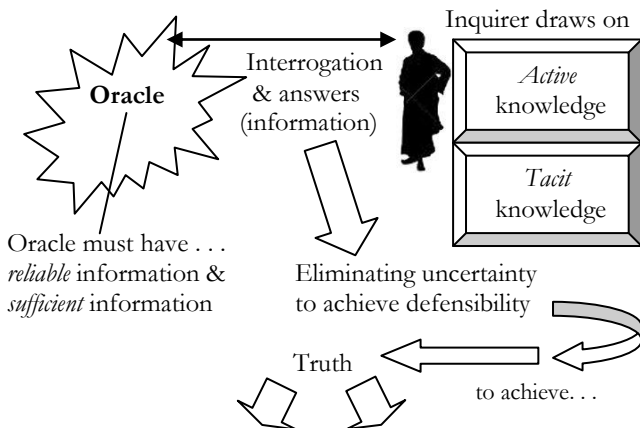
⁸⁵⁵ Hintikka, “Reasoning about Knowledge,” 63, starts by declaring, “This logic is primarily a logic of knowing that, and its semantics can be considered an explication of the well-known idea that ‘information means elimination of uncertainty.’”

Of course, as seen already, not all that is called ‘knowledge’ is equal; there is ‘weak’ and there is ‘strong.’ The ideas listed above apply to a strong sense for the term ‘knowledge.’

Alongside such ideas should be placed the different *kinds* of knowledge Hintikka lists. These include:

1. *active*—conscious knowledge drawn upon by an inquirer;
2. *tacit*—implicit or unconscious knowledge held by an inquirer or ‘sub-oracle’;
3. *potential*—all possible conclusions an inquirer can establish through interrogation; and
4. *virtual*—all possible conclusions an inquirer can establish through interrogation *without* introducing new ‘auxiliary’ individuals.⁸⁵⁶

When we put such things together we have a picture like this:



⁸⁵⁶ Hintikka, “Reasoning about Knowledge,” 78–79.

Potential knowledge

Virtual knowledge

What Hintikka's interrogative model does is shift attention from *what* knowledge is, and its *possession*, to *how* knowledge is achieved, that is, to its *acquisition*.

Differences between Knowledge & Belief

In all our remarks thus far our focus has been on epistemic logic and knowledge. But, of course, Hintikka also has thoughts on doxastic logic and belief. In an essay titled "Epistemology without Knowledge, and without Belief," he argues that while a strong sense of knowledge requires sufficient evidentiary warrant, belief also is not absent a need for justification. Hintikka, with decision-making theory in mind, offers the following comparison between belief and knowledge:

In order for a rational agent to act on his or her belief, this belief clearly must be backed up by some evidence. Otherwise, current decision theory makes little sense. The difference is that the criteria of what entities are to act are different in the case of belief from what they are in the case of knowledge. If I act on a belief, that belief must satisfy my personal requirements for that role. They may vary from person to person. In contrast, the criteria of knowing are impersonal and not dependent on the agent in question.⁸⁵⁷

Nevertheless, both belief and knowledge serve a similar purpose—guiding decisions—even if in different ways.⁸⁵⁸

⁸⁵⁷ Hintikka, *Socratic Epistemology*, 13.

⁸⁵⁸ Hintikka, *Socratic Epistemology*, 16.

Belief, like knowledge, is a product of inquiry.⁸⁵⁹ But there are important differences, starting with the fact that, in his estimation, developing a theory of knowledge acquisition has to remain independent of the idea of belief. Another difference lies in the role of criteria involved in each with respect to a readiness to act on some piece of information:

[W]hereas the criteria of knowing are impersonal (even though they can be relative to the subject matter), the criteria of belief can be personal and dependent on an even wider selection of the aspects of the subject matter. In claiming to know, I am making a commitment to others, but in forming a belief, I am usually responsible only to myself.⁸⁶⁰

Belief and knowledge share similar *standards*. Also, both display a sense of entitlement, though neither are required to use it. Similarly, neither require action. And, he emphasizes, both are born of inquiry. This last point means both share a need of evidentiary support—a reason to believe—at least with respect to *true* beliefs.⁸⁶¹

With respect to inquiry an important matter is when a process of inquiry is stopped. Hintikka notes how much attention has come to be given to the whole matter of *belief revision*. He asserts that the difference here between belief and knowledge lies not in how much justification is achieved, but in the *kind of evaluation* each employs. This goes back to what he has said already: knowledge must satisfy certain impersonal (i.e.,

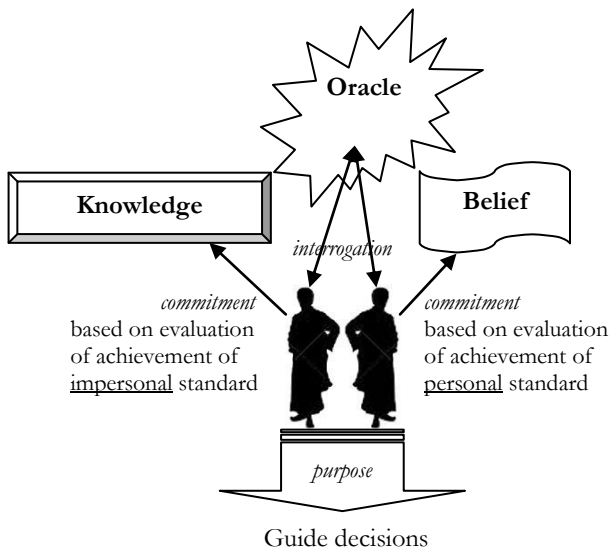
⁸⁵⁹ Hintikka, *Socratic Epistemology*, 30–33.

⁸⁶⁰ Hintikka, *Socratic Epistemology*, 31.

⁸⁶¹ Hintikka, *Socratic Epistemology*, 31–32.

objective) standards, whereas belief has only to meet personal ones.⁸⁶²

The matter might be pictured thus:



Conclusion: Hintikka's Revolution

Hintikka, near the end of the 20th century, makes the following claim:

There is a largely unacknowledged revolution in progress in epistemology. For the first time, theorists of knowledge have access to a fully explicit logical and semantical analysis of the concept of knowledge that does

⁸⁶² Hintikka, *Socratic Epistemology*, 32.

justice to its nature and function and to its different varieties.⁸⁶³

The state of this quiet revolution—more in the spirit of Jefferson's than Lenin's, he observes—some quarter-century after Hintikka's remark is hard to judge. A casual review of the literature lends an impression that most of what is going on in epistemic literature at present concerns research into epistemic and doxastic states toward the end of better modeling their dynamics. Epistemic logic is employed not only by philosophers, but also by Artificial Intelligence (AI) researchers, theoretical computer scientists, game theorists, and cognitive psychologists, among others. It might well be argued that epistemic logic has had its greatest success *outside* of philosophy.

Virtue Epistemology

One significant development in epistemology over the last few decades has been the emergence of a position within the Analytic tradition that addresses both the Gettier problem and that participates in the conversations of epistemic and doxastic logic. This approach, termed "Virtue Epistemology," derives its name from focusing upon those intellectual characteristics conducive to intellectual or cognitive achievement. Thus "vir-

⁸⁶³ Hintikka, "Knowledge Acknowledged," 251. In the introduction to his *Socratic Epistemology*, 1, Hintikka writes, "If Thomas Kuhn had not sworn to me a long time ago that he would never again use the p-word, I would have been tempted to introduce my viewpoint in this volume by saying that contemporary epistemology draws its inspiration from an incorrect paradigm that I am trying to overthrow."

tue” stands for those positive intellectual markers that make for greater success in epistemology.

As the above suggests, the focus in virtue epistemology is on the *Knower* more than on what is known. It thus proposes a different perspective on traditional issues such as *what* knowledge is and *how* it is known. In order to see this alternative we shall focus primarily on the development of this position by its founder.

Virtue epistemology's architect is Ernest Sosa (1940–).⁸⁶⁴ It has been said that virtue epistemology is birthed in his 1980 article, “The Raft and the Pyramid.” These metaphorical labels refer to two dominant alternatives about what we know and how we know it. They are:

1. *Foundationalism*—knowledge is like a pyramid erected on a foundation where every piece is connected (example: Descartes).
2. *Coherentism*—knowledge is like a raft floating free where each part coheres with the others, though when any ‘repair’ is made it happens while standing on some other part to do so (example: German Idealism).

With respect to Gettier's problem and the matter of justifying a true belief as knowledge, both foundationalism and coherentism share in common a giving of primary attention to the properties of beliefs. In foundationalism a self-evident premise (an infallible belief) is then built upon through inference to produce new points that are secure (certain). In coherentism each and every belief coheres with the system of beliefs as a whole, whether through explanatory relations, probability relations, or logical ones.⁸⁶⁵

After critiquing both positions, Sosa proposes moving primary focus elsewhere. Taking his cue from an ethics of moral virtues (Reliabilism)—i.e., examining

⁸⁶⁴ For an introduction to various facets of his thinking see the edited collection by Turri, *Virtuous Thoughts*. For a brief overview of Virtue Epistemology, see Greco, “Virtue Epistemology.”

⁸⁶⁵ Sosa, “The Pyramid and the Raft,” especially 5–6.

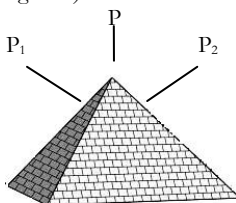
the rules a person embodies in stable dispositions—he suggests doing something comparable in epistemology. The result is a stratification of justification as follows:

Here primary justification would apply to *intellectual* virtues, to stable dispositions for belief acquisition, through their greater contribution toward getting us to the truth. Secondary justification would then attach to particular beliefs in virtue of their source in intellectual virtues or other such justified dispositions.⁸⁶⁶

Sosa frequently uses the metaphor of a ‘tree of knowledge,’ as when he writes, “We may plausibly view every bit of knowledge as resting on a tree of knowledge, a tree-like justificational structure that terminates and involves no essential falsehood.”⁸⁶⁷ And so we might offer as an initial picture these contrasts:

Foundationalism

every part connected firmly with each part ultimately depending on a self-evident foundation (e.g., Cogito, ergo sum):

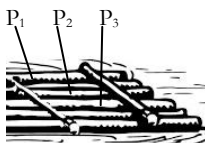


Ultimate source:

Indubitable belief

Coherentism

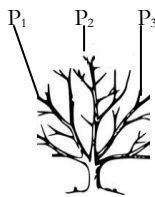
every part relates to every other part—they cohere—but without dependence on any one part:



Relations among
beliefs

Reliabilism

every part attaches to the source which justifies it, namely intellectual virtues:



Intellectual
virtues

⁸⁶⁶ Sosa, “The Raft and the Pyramid,” 23.

⁸⁶⁷ Sosa, “Epistemic Presupposition,” 79. Also see, for example, Sosa, “Human Knowledge: Reply,” 291.

Sosa develops Virtue Epistemology in doing *normative epistemology*, i.e., epistemology grounded in *values*, how something *ought to be*.⁸⁶⁸ Normative epistemology has among its primary concerns the problem of belief justification, which means it engages with the Gettier problem. Sosa offers an extended account of “epistemic normativity as a kind of ‘performance normativity’” in his volume *Knowing Full Well*, where he presents it as a solution to the Gettier problem.⁸⁶⁹

Sosa regards Gettier as having been successful in demonstrating that for a true belief to be knowledge it has to be more than competently held (i.e., possess sufficient warrant). Thus, Sosa says, since Gettier the problem in sustaining a Platonic version of knowledge as true justified belief requires answering this question: “What further condition, added to, or in place of, being competently held, must a true belief satisfy in order to constitute knowledge?”⁸⁷⁰

With the Gettier problem still in mind, in another volume Sosa remarks, “[S]uch progress as now can be made depends, in my opinion, on a careful study of the conditions within which a correctly believed proposi-

⁸⁶⁸ This approach regards language as normative in nature rather than, as Aristotle and many others think, “conventional,” i.e., language as presenting meaning through linguistic conventions (e.g., sentence structure or accents); conventions are the standard and expected practices in a language.

⁸⁶⁹ Sosa, *Knowing Full Well*, vii. As Sosa explains in Marshall and Sosa, “Interview,” he has in mind the kind of epistemology done by Plato with respect to a theory of knowledge, where there is a normativity of epistemological judgment as attempts to get an answer right to a given question (such as Socrates’ “What is knowledge?”).

⁸⁷⁰ Sosa, *Knowing Full Well*, 2.

tion is a bit of knowledge.”⁸⁷¹ These ‘conditions’ entail a number of elements, but to grasp them means first understanding what Sosa has in mind by ‘performance.’

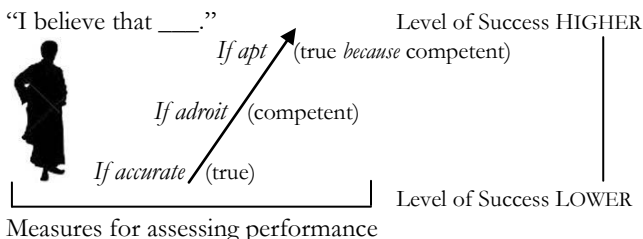
Belief as a Kind of Performance

In his *Virtue Epistemology* Sosa considers belief as a kind of performance (often long-sustained). In *Knowing Full Well* he elaborates his thinking of belief as a kind of performance:

Belief is a kind of performance, which attains one level of success if it is true (or accurate), a second level if it is competent (or adroit), and a third if its truth manifests the believer’s competence (i.e., if it is apt). Knowledge on one level (the animal level) is apt belief. The epistemic normativity constitutive of such knowledge is thus a kind of performance normativity.⁸⁷²

Let us picture it in this manner:

Belief as a kind of Performance



Because true beliefs can result from chance (luck), Sosa remarks, “At a minimum, beliefs can be assessed for correctness independently of any competence that

⁸⁷¹ Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective*, 19.

⁸⁷² Sosa, *Knowing Full Well*, 1.

they may manifest.”⁸⁷³ Nevertheless, with respect to knowledge it is only true beliefs associated with performance that is the concern here. Beliefs are a kind of performance where there is a particular *aim*.

In the case of belief, *the aim is truth*.⁸⁷⁴ Accuracy, adroitness, and aptness are three *measures* of performance in such situations. Together they form what Sosa refers to as an “AAA structure.” Let’s examine each measure:

1. *Accuracy*—the basic measure of whether the aim is achieved. It is the most basic measure.
2. *Adroitness*—this is the measure of the Knower’s personal *skill*.
3. *Aptness*—this is the measure of the fit between accuracy and adroitness so that the result achieved is *because* of the skill of the Knower.⁸⁷⁵

Of these three, adroitness especially requires some additional comment. If it is the measure of skill, then we must know what Sosa is referring to. Skill in the context of knowledge involves intellectual activity built on personal abilities applied with more or less effort. So skill is tied intimately to the notion of competence—the ability to accomplish or achieve something (e.g., truth) successfully. Adroitness as ‘competence’ refers to “epistemic virtue.”⁸⁷⁶

⁸⁷³ Sosa, *Virtue Epistemology*, 23.

⁸⁷⁴ See Sosa, *Knowing Full Well*, chapter 2, or Sosa, “Précis of *Knowing Full Well*,” 597.

⁸⁷⁵ These are discussed many places by Sosa, but a conveniently short and tight explanation can be found in Sosa, *Virtue Epistemology*, 22–23. In Marshall and Sosa, “Interview,” Sosa describes aptness as “to succeed through competence.”

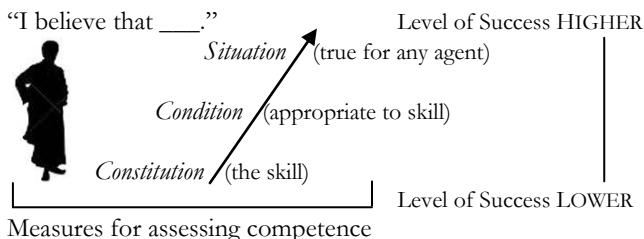
⁸⁷⁶ Sosa, *Virtue Epistemology*, 23.

Epistemic virtue refers to *competence* and Sosa writes that “competences” are dispositions to perform well.⁸⁷⁷ These, of course, vary in degree.⁸⁷⁸ However, he indicates they share three (partially specified) components:

1. *constitution*—the basis or skill entailed;
2. *condition*—a ‘trigger-manifestation’ factor such that when it is present probability for performance increases; and,
3. *situation*—generally restricted (i.e., with discernible boundaries), but only relevant situations matter, and these are with respect to a given agent (i.e., “believer” or “Knower”).

Once again Sosa envisions these in their potential relations to each other such that we have a new picture similar in design to our last one:

Epistemic Virtue as Competence



The bottom level is *constitutional competence*. When to it is added an appropriate condition the result is *inner compe-*

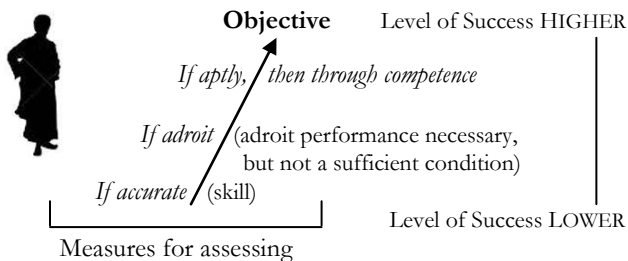
⁸⁷⁷ Sosa, “How Competence Matters,” 465: “Dispositions admit degrees. . . . Similarly for competences.” Also see Greco, “Virtue Epistemology,” 520.

⁸⁷⁸ Sosa, “How Competence Matters,” 475, n. 1.

tence. When to a relevant constitution and an appropriate condition is added the Knower's ("agent's") situation there is *complete competence*.⁸⁷⁹

This picture can be nested in the one preceding it:

Belief Performance with an Aim + Competence



With respect to knowledge, a Knower manifests complete competence when the objective aimed at is successfully reached and done so aptly (i.e., the truth achieved is achieved because of the Knower's competence).⁸⁸⁰

The "virtues" of Virtue Epistemology, because they relate to knowledge, refer to intellectual qualities. Sosa says, "Intellectual virtue is something that resides in a subject, something relative to an environment. . . ." He then expresses this logically:

A subject S's intellectual virtue V relative to an "environment" E may be defined as S's disposition to believe correctly propositions in a field F relative to which S stands in conditions C, in "environment" E.⁸⁸¹

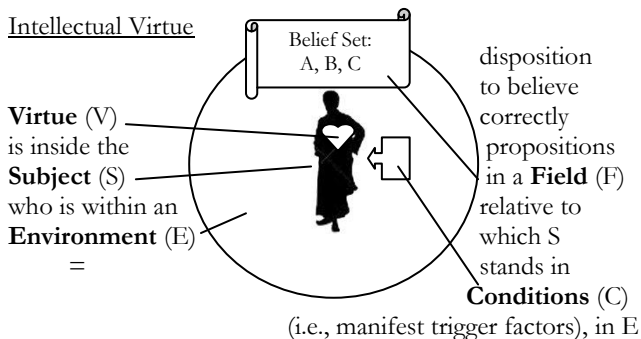
We can try to render this pictorially, as follows:

⁸⁷⁹ Sosa, "How Competence Matters," 465.

⁸⁸⁰ See Sosa, "How Competence Matters," 470.

⁸⁸¹ Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective*, 140.

Intellectual Virtue



Or, to put it in general terms, intellectual virtue is a disposition, inside a person, to believe correctly belief propositions that are part of a set that is relative to the person in an environment where some particular trigger or triggers makes it more likely to activate that person's skills to thereby demonstrate competence.

Presently virtue epistemologists differ concerning the nature of those things that should be called 'virtues.' *Virtue reliabilists* focus upon stable, reliable cognitive faculties such as intuition, perception, and memory. Sosa himself articulates this position. *Virtue responsibilists* (or 'character-based'), on the other hand, look to such acquired traits in human personality as conscientiousness and open-mindedness (part of the so-called 'Big Five' trait model of personality).⁸⁸²

We now have enough to return to the matter we began with—the question of how one adequately justi-

⁸⁸² See Battaly, "Virtue Epistemology," especially §2. Another virtue reliabilist is John Greco. Note, however, Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*, 2 (and 35), maintains that "virtue reliabilism has *always* included a responsibilist component within its focus." He thinks the character-based intellectual virtues are best understood as auxiliary to the reliable-competence ones (pp. 2, 36).

fies true belief. As we have seen, Sosa regards the Gettier problem as having made necessary something in addition to sufficient warrant.

Criterion for Justification

“Virtue epistemology,” Sosa declares, “is distinguished by its emphasis on the *subject* as seat of justification.”⁸⁸³ Sosa’s solution is the personal element of a competent achievement based on intellectual virtue—and thus, *not on luck*. John Greco, in explaining Virtue Epistemology with respect to justification, offers the following as the criterion for justified belief:

S is justified in believing that *p* if and only if S’s believing that *p* is the result of S’s intellectual virtues or faculties functioning in an appropriate environment.⁸⁸⁴

In ordinary English, a person (Subject, or S) is warranted in believing a given proposition (*p*) if-and-only-if the person’s believing that proposition is the result of her or his intellectual virtues or faculties as these are functioning in an appropriate environment. So, for example, if a person says, “I believe it is raining outside,” that belief is warranted if it results from the exercise of personal intellectual virtues rather than being a lucky guess.

The justification of a true belief, then, depends on the following:

1. Intellectual virtues, and
2. Function of intellectual virtues in an appropriate environment.

⁸⁸³ Sosa, *Reflective Knowledge*, 187.

⁸⁸⁴ Greco, “Virtue Epistemology,” 520.

We already have considered what intellectual virtues are. An ‘appropriate environment’ is one in which the person can relevantly and appropriately apply his or her intellectual virtues toward achieving the truth. If a person is not in such an environment a true belief can only be a lucky guess.

Epistemic Values

Sosa agrees with Plato (and most philosophers) that there is a *value* dimension in epistemology and that it expresses that knowledge is better than belief.⁸⁸⁵ He lists as epistemic values the following:

1. *truth*—the aim of belief, and if knowledge is a kind of belief, then of knowledge as well;
2. *safety*—minimizing the risk that a belief is false;
3. *coherence*—maximizing the compatible relationship of a belief within a system of beliefs;
4. *understanding/explanation*—i.e., understanding as the ability to provide an explanation; and
5. *discovery*—the achievement of knowledge by one’s own doing, using one’s own faculties, abilities, and skill.⁸⁸⁶

Sosa comments, “When they constitute knowledge, the safer, better justified, and more reliably acquired beliefs constitute better knowledge.”⁸⁸⁷

Of these five virtues, safety is perhaps especially distinctive to Virtue Epistemology and has received significant attention. Sosa writes:

⁸⁸⁵ Sosa, “Value Matters in Epistemology.” Also see *Knowing Full Well*, chapter 3.

⁸⁸⁶ Sosa, “Human Knowledge,” 194–95.

⁸⁸⁷ Sosa, “Human Knowledge,” 194.

One other idea has also been part of virtue epistemology, that of the *safety* of a belief. . . . A performance is safe, if and only if not easily would it then have failed, not easily would it have fallen short of its aim. . . . A belief that *p* is *safe* provided it would have been held only if (most likely) *p*.

Even better is when a belief is both safe and *sensitive* (“if and only if were it not so that *p*, he would not (likely) *p*.”) But a belief can be safe without being sensitive.⁸⁸⁸

Knowledge

Sosa, who frankly admits his fondness for the common sense approach of Thomas Reid (1710–1796) and G. E. Moore, places Virtue Epistemology in line with an epistemological tradition he traces among Aristotle, Aquinas, Thomas Reid, and Descartes. In an interview he broadly characterizes knowledge this way: “Knowledge in my view is a form of action. It involves endeavors to get it right, and more broadly it concerns aimings, which can be functional rather than intentional.”⁸⁸⁹

If knowledge is a form of action—specifically a kind of performance that aims at an achievement—it means what Sosa says elsewhere when remarking that Virtue Epistemology offers a “new epistemic notion of being-in-a-position-to-know.”⁸⁹⁰ In another essay he explains: “My notion of ‘being in a position to know’ is approximately that of being in a position such that one

⁸⁸⁸ Sosa, *Virtue Epistemology*, 25.

⁸⁸⁹ Marshall and Sosa, “Interview.” Among nonintentional aimings he names functional and teleological ones.

⁸⁹⁰ Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective*, 30.

has only to believe correctly and with adequate justification in order to know.”⁸⁹¹

Narrowing the matter down a little further, in a 2001 paper on knowledge Sosa characterizes knowledge as something that in a number of ways varies by degree. He lists four ways in which *knowledge is a matter of degree*:

1. *certainty*—how sure the Knower is about whatever is being known;
2. *security* or “*safety*”—how easily or not the Knower might be wrong;
3. *justification*—how strongly evidence supports the Knower; and
4. *truth-conducive*—how reliably truth is acquired or sustained.⁸⁹²

Even more specifically, Sosa divides knowledge into two fundamental kinds. Both need to be understood in light of what we have covered so far. The two kinds are:

1. *animal*—knowledge that is apt belief, but without being *defensibly* apt belief; and,
2. *reflective*—knowledge that is apt belief, plus defensibility.⁸⁹³

Despite the name of the first, he views each as a *human* accomplishment. For example, perceptual competence (ordinary perceptual beliefs) can qualify as animal knowledge.⁸⁹⁴

⁸⁹¹ Sosa, “Epistemic Presupposition,” 80.

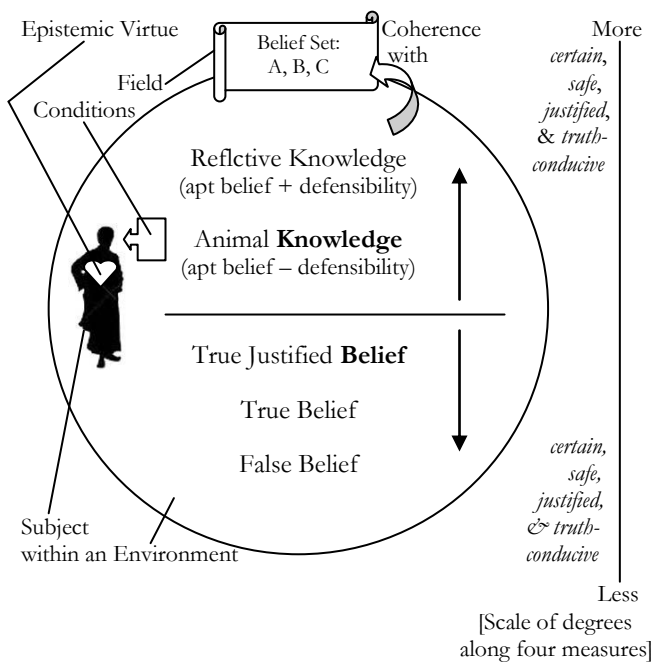
⁸⁹² Sosa, “Human Knowledge,” 194.

⁸⁹³ Sosa, *Virtue Epistemology*, 24. He terms it “enlightened knowledge” in *Reflective Knowledge*, 153.

⁸⁹⁴ Sosa, *Virtue Epistemology*, 30.

As already seen by indication of the differences of degree, there is a hierarchical arrangement between the two kinds of knowledge. Animal knowledge, while genuine knowledge and good, is less than reflective knowledge, which is ‘better.’ Sosa writes of reflective knowledge, “This is a knowledge requiring free, volitional endorsement by the subject who judges, or the corresponding disposition.”⁸⁹⁵

If we put things together to form a rough composite picture of belief and knowledge, it looks like this:



⁸⁹⁵ Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*, 36.

It is obvious that the difference distinguishing the two kinds of knowledge is the matter of *defensibility*. Sosa declares, “We want a knowledge that is defensible in the arena of reflection.”⁸⁹⁶ To be rationally defensible a belief must be secured against doubt. When relevant skeptical doubts or objections are raised there must be available a responsible answer able to substantiate the aptness of the belief. For Sosa this includes the defense that the belief under question or attack coheres with a system of beliefs.⁸⁹⁷

Put another way, the difference between animal and reflective knowledge is one of *degree*.⁸⁹⁸ We already have seen this idea so not much needs to be added. However, it may help to see how this works by considering the value of safety. “What knowledge requires,” writes Sosa, “is hence not outright safety but at most basis-relative safety. What is required of one’s belief, if it is to constitute knowledge, is at most its having some

⁸⁹⁶ Sosa, *Reflective Knowledge*, 21. Cf. p. 184 with respect to Descartes and a position “defensible against any foreseeable attack, no holds barred, against any specific doubt actually pressed or in the offing, no matter how slight.”

⁸⁹⁷ Remember, Sosa identifies coherence as an epistemic value. Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*, 249, comments, “Once we can pick out a set of our beliefs as ones dependent on a certain way of acquiring and sustaining them, the reliability of their source may be pertinent to their epistemic status.” Habib and Lehrer, “Sosa on Circularity and Coherence,” 109, write, “So let us call this restraint, one requiring that a target belief that coheres with a system of beliefs can be defended by the system against objections to the belief, the *defensibility constraint*.”

⁸⁹⁸ Sosa, *Virtue Epistemology*, 32.

basis that it would not easily have had unless true, some basis that it would (likely) have had only if true.”⁸⁹⁹

It can be seen that the degree of difference between animal knowledge and reflective knowledge is also with respect to *competence*. Sosa writes:

For any correct belief that *p*, the correctness of that belief is attributable to a competence only if it derives from the exercise of that competence in appropriate conditions for its exercise, and that exercise in those conditions would not then too easily have issued a false belief.⁹⁰⁰

Yet another way to approach the difference between belief and knowledge is this: “A belief amounts to animal knowledge provided it is apt, but it amounts to reflective knowledge only if it is also meta-competent.”⁹⁰¹ Thus *aptness* is a critical discriminator.

Finally, it is worth noting that Sosa warns against what he calls “epistemic irresponsibility,” a “substandard performance” that might, for example, result from “neglectful data collection.”⁹⁰²

Concluding Remark

As it stands at present, Virtue Epistemology does not represent a “school” of philosophy with agreed upon dogmas, but is rather a name for a group of posi-

⁸⁹⁹ Sosa, *Virtue Epistemology*, 26.

⁹⁰⁰ Sosa, *Virtue Epistemology*, 33.

⁹⁰¹ Sosa, “How Competence Matters,” 472. The matter of being meta-competent is a “second-order” epistemological one, i.e., it rises above “first-order” epistemology, which concerns knowledge claims about the world; second-order claims are about knowledge itself.

⁹⁰² Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective*, 26.

tions within a broad approach that shares some central convictions. However, it has shown sustained vigor and growth while remaining true to Sosa's original basic notions.⁹⁰³

Theoretical Development of Established Approaches: Hinge Epistemology

There are other trends evident like those so far treated in that they *seek to build upon past positions*, such as reviving or at least reinvigorating an established approach. Among these the most notable might be *hinge epistemology*, which derives its name from a remark made by Wittgenstein in *On Certainty*: "That is, the questions we ask and our doubts rest on the certainty that certain propositions are beyond doubt, are, as it were, like hinges (*die Angeln*) on which those turn."⁹⁰⁴ It is thus an extension of the analytic tradition in philosophy.

Philosophers Annalisa Coliva and Danièle Moyal-Sharrock have been its most tireless advocates. Coliva reports that they share the opinion "that it is only in this way that Wittgenstein's contribution to epistemology will not remain a topic merely for scholars interested in the history of analytic philosophy."⁹⁰⁵ The development of hinge epistemology very much reflects the climate of our times: a preoccupation with how one may justify claims to knowledge. Indeed, Coliva charac-

⁹⁰³ For broad access to and a further review of Virtue Epistemology, see Battaly, *Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology*.

⁹⁰⁴ Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (*Über Gewißheit*), ¶341 [German ed., 29]: *D. h. die Fragen, die wir stellen, und unsre Zweifel beruhen darauf, daß gewisse Sätze vom Zweifel ausgenommen sind, gleichsam die Angeln, in welchen jene sich bewegen*. Coliva, "Hinges and Certainty," 7, asserts that the focus in *On Certainty* is hinges and their role in epistemic practice.

⁹⁰⁵ Coliva, *Extended Rationality*, ix.

terizes it as “a theory about justification (and knowledge).”⁹⁰⁶ Hinge epistemology’s central claim builds upon Wittgenstein’s idea that epistemic justifications hinge on some basic assumptions and that epistemic rationality extends to these very hinges.⁹⁰⁷

The metaphor of a *hinge* has respect to *something that must stay in place in order for epistemic and language practices to occur*. Their function is to permit the acquisition of evidence used in assessing propositions of an ordinary empirical nature. But, as hinges, they are themselves beyond knowledge or justification.

Coliva says Wittgenstein claims that, structurally, hinges show six characteristics, most of which can be expressed as ‘neither-nor’ matters:

1. neither true nor false;
2. neither justified nor unjustified;
3. neither known nor unknown;
4. cannot sensibly be doubted;
5. neither rational nor not rational; and,
6. they are *rules* (not empirical propositions).⁹⁰⁸

Coliva acknowledges the difficulties raised by such points and the many ways they have been interpreted.

The last point in the above list is a positive one and shows that in some fashion hinges operate normatively. In Coliva’s view hinges are two kinds of *rules*:

1. meaning constitutive rules, and
2. rules of evidential significance.

⁹⁰⁶ Coliva, “Which Hinge Epistemology?” 79.

⁹⁰⁷ See Coliva, *Extended Rationality*, and also Coliva, “Which Hinge Epistemology?” (which also appears in Coliva and

⁹⁰⁸ Coliva, *Moore and Wittgenstein*, 6–7 (also §3 in Coliva, “Which Hinge Epistemology?”).

The latter, she argues, pertains in most cases. Further, she sees them as figuring within language games, but not as part of epistemic ones.⁹⁰⁹

With respect to knowledge, Coliva argues that in *On Certainty* Wittgenstein uses the expression “I know” in three different senses:

1. *empirical* (a relevant claim based on reasons which can be explored for verification);
2. *grammatical* (an aspect of a language game, as in statements of self-ascription of a mental state, and without epistemic value); and,
3. *philosophical* (or ‘dogmatic’: it retains an appearance of sense but is nonsensical).⁹¹⁰

In the second decade of the 21st century hinge epistemology has gathered enough attention to draw together a number of scholars in publications and meetings. A major volume edited by Coliva and Moyal-Sharrock appeared in 2016.⁹¹¹ The first two Hinge Epistemology Conferences occurred in 2018 and 2019. It appears to be the most significant way in which the analytic tradition remains active in epistemology.

Trends in Addressing Classical Issues

Philosopher John Kekes, more than 40 years ago in his essay titled “Recent Trends and Future Prospects in Epistemology” writes: “Epistemology used to be called the theory of knowledge. I think that the most signifi-

⁹⁰⁹ Coliva, *Moore and Wittgenstein*, 10. On hinges as rules, also see p. 178.

⁹¹⁰ Coliva, *Moore and Wittgenstein*, ch. 2; Coliva, “Hinges and Certainty,” 2–3.

⁹¹¹ Coliva and Moyal-Sharrock, *Hinge Epistemology*.

cant feature of contemporary epistemology is that this label has become inappropriate.”⁹¹² His assertion is, of course, debatable. Among those who grant it, some will mourn while others will nod and think, ‘This is a good thing.’ Those who contest it might point to one or another of certain developments in the last few decades as suggesting that the theory of knowledge still matters. Our purpose here is not to examine all that is occurring in contemporary epistemology, but to highlight now a few other basic trends and especially to identify any that relate directly to a theory of knowledge.

Current epistemology shows an ongoing interest in revisiting classical issues and problems. In this respect, each of the following remains pertinent to study (as we already have seen in what we have examined):

1. addressing *Skepticism*,
2. the problem of *confirmation*,
3. the role of *belief*, and
4. better *justification* for claims of knowledge.

Ever since its emergence in ancient philosophy Skepticism has posed sharp questions and significant challenges for thinking about knowledge. It continues to be the case that Skepticism occupies considerable attention with much energy devoted to contesting it. One especially noteworthy approach has been to grant Skepticism certain points but then diminish their impact by demonstrating their irrelevancy.⁹¹³

⁹¹² Kekes, “Recent Trends,” 87.

⁹¹³ Hendricks, *Mainstream and Formal Epistemology*, 2, comments, “Contemporary epistemologies have developed a family of countermeasures for standing up to the skeptical challenge; these exhibit a type of ‘bluntness’ similar to that of set-theoretical forcing. The

The problem of *confirmation* concerns the fallibility of human reasoning. Even with sufficient and relevant information people can reason to wrong conclusions. Hume brought forceful attention to this issue and it has remained a concern ever since.

We have seen throughout this volume that the relation of knowledge to belief has been a persistent and central issue. Both Gettier problems and Hintikka's logic in their own ways address this matter. Present discussions of *belief* might focus on its nature, its role, and/or its justification.

The issue of belief has come to be closely associated with another matter. Thus, in another important way both the occupation with the Gettier problem and the development of epistemic logic share a different common center—the desire to provide better *justification* for claims of knowledge. It might be fairly argued that such a desire, expressed in one or another manner, is the predominant theme in today's epistemology.

Concluding Comment

I retain hope based on Aristotle's conviction—one I strongly share—that all people, by nature, stretch toward knowledge. As long as that is the case, interest in theory of knowledge will remain. If this volume helps stir that spark then it will have been richly rewarded.

idea of epistemological forcing is as follows: whenever skeptics cite possibilities of error as arguments against knowledge claims, the strategy is to show that, although they are possibilities of error, they fail to be *relevant* possibilities of error."

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Dr. G. G. Bolich,
scholar and educator,
is the author of many
works in the fields of
philosophy, psychology
and religious studies.

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